



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 1 · B1A

Networking that works

Theme · First Contact



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Networking that works

Theme: First Contact



Learning objectives

- Introduce yourself and your role clearly in under 30 seconds.
- Ask direct and indirect questions to keep a conversation going.
- Use small-talk topics that work across corporate, tech and freelance settings.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Agree or disagree

Read each statement. Vote A / D / ID and defend your choice in one sentence.

"Networking events are a waste of time for anyone under 30."

"The best professional contacts are made by accident, not on purpose."

"If you have to introduce yourself, you've already lost the room."

"LinkedIn has replaced business cards — for better AND for worse."

Lead-in: types of networker

Match each behaviour to the label.

1. Hands out cards to everyone

2. Asks questions and remembers names

3. Talks only to people they already know

followUp: Which one are you closest to today?

Reading: The 90-second rule

Recruiters, investors and prospective clients all report the same thing: they form a strong opinion of a professional within about 90 seconds of meeting them. This is not fair, but it is useful information. Those 90 seconds are almost always driven by three things — how you introduce your role, the first question you ask, and how you listen to the answer.

The most common mistake is to over-explain what you do. "I'm a senior product manager at a Series-B fintech focused on cross-border B2B payments" is accurate, but it lands as noise. "I help small companies move money between countries without paying huge fees" opens a conversation. The second sentence uses plain verbs and a real problem; the first uses labels only insiders understand.

The most useful habit, though, is not about you. Great networkers ask one specific question, then follow up on the answer instead of jumping to their next pre-planned line. "What are you working on this quarter?" beats "What do you do?" every time, because it invites a story rather than a title.

1. How quickly do people form a first professional impression?

(A) About 5 minutes

(B) About 90 seconds

(C) After a follow-up email

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2. What's the main problem with the "senior product manager at a Series-B fintech" line?
 - (A) It's too short
 - (B) It uses only insider labels, not a real problem
 - (C) It's grammatically wrong
3. What do great networkers do differently?
 - (A) They talk faster
 - (B) They ask a specific question and follow up on the answer
 - (C) They avoid asking questions
4. The phrase "lands as noise" in paragraph 2 means...
 - (A) is heard but not understood or remembered
 - (B) is offensive
 - (C) is spoken too loudly

Vocabulary in context

Find the words in the text and match them to the meaning.

prospective — possible future (client, employer, partner)

over-explain — give more detail than the listener needs

insider — someone inside a group who knows its jargon

follow up — return to something to continue or check it

pre-planned — decided in advance

invite a story — ask in a way that gets a real, longer answer

Vocabulary: job roles, industries & small talk

individual contributor — works on the work — no direct reports

people manager — responsible for a team of direct reports

founder — started the company; often wears many hats

independent consultant — self-employed, sells expertise engagement by engagement

subject-matter expert — brought in from outside to advise on a specific problem

key stakeholder — anyone with real influence over, or exposure to, the outcome

industry gathering — large sector event with talks & networking

kick off — start (a project, a quarter, a call)

cash runway — how many months of capital a startup has left

quarter (Q1–Q4) — three-month reporting period

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commute — your daily journey to the office

remote / hybrid / on-site — the three most common working arrangements

practice

Complete the sentences with *ONE* word or phrase from the lists.

1. She's not a manager yet — she's still an ____.

2. We're about to ____ a big rebrand project next Monday.

3. The main ____ on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.

4. How was your ____ this morning — did the metro cooperate?

5. The startup has about nine months of ____ before they need to raise again.

6. We brought in an outside ____ to help us re-price the product.

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. She's not a manager yet — she's still an employee who works on the work with no direct reports.

2. We're about to start a big rebrand project next Monday.

3. The main people with influence over the outcome on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.

4. How was your daily journey to the office this morning — did the metro cooperate?

5. The startup has about nine months of capital left before they run out before they need to raise again.

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Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short follow-up memo to your manager summarizing the key connections made at an industry gathering and how you plan to follow up.

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: Q3 Industry Gathering — Networking Summary. The event was a productive use of time; I managed to connect with several key stakeholders from the APAC region who are currently facing similar onboarding frictions. Specifically, I met a founder from a Series-B fintech who is struggling with their cash runway and looking for the kind of subject-matter expert advice we provide. My plain-language introduction seemed to land well, avoiding the usual jargon that often lands as noise in these rooms. I also spoke with an independent consultant who has worked with our main competitor; she provided some useful insights into their current remote-first strategy. I plan to follow up with both by Friday to suggest a brief introductory call. This quarter, my goal is to turn these initial 'coffee-break' chats into formal leads before we kick off the next project phase.



Grammar focus: Question formation for networking

1. Direct questions — Standard word order: (Question word) + auxiliary + subject + verb. • Where do you work? • What are you working on this quarter?

2. Indirect questions — **softer, more professional** — After polite openers, use statement word order and NO do/does/did: • Where's the coffee? → Could you tell me where the coffee is? • What does she do? → Do you mind if I ask what she does?

3. Follow-up questions that keep the conversation alive — Great networkers rarely change the topic. They use short prompts: • Oh really? How come? • What made you decide to do that? • That's interesting — could you say a bit more about that?

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Exercise A — Make it indirect

Rewrite each direct question as an indirect / softer version.

1. What do you do?

2. Where is the breakout room?

3. How did you get into product management?

4. Is your company hiring right now?

5. What are the main challenges in your role?

Exercise B — Fix the mistake

Each question has ONE mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. Could you tell me where is the registration desk?

2. Who did told you about this conference?

3. Do you know what time does the keynote start?

4. I was wondering how long you working there?

Exercise C — Follow-up chain

Write ONE follow-up question that keeps each mini-conversation alive (any indirect / short prompt is fine).

1. "I'm actually a freelance data consultant." →

2. "We're launching in the LATAM market this quarter." →

3. "My biggest headache right now is hiring." →

4. "I've just switched teams internally." →

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Listening: Two strangers at a conference coffee break

Two professionals are queuing for coffee at an industry conference.

pre

What do you think the first question will be?

Do you think they'll exchange contact details?

gist

1. How does the freelancer describe what he does — in insider terms or plain language?

2. What is the designer working on this quarter?

3. Do they agree to stay in touch?

detail

1. Why did he leave his last full-time job?

2. What surprises her about freelancing, according to him?

3. What specific follow-up does he offer?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED, not directly stated.

1. Who is more comfortable at this conference — Voice A or Voice B? How do you know?

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2. Which of them is more likely to follow up first, and why?

3. What does Voice B's phrase 'Loved the team, hated the projects' tell you about how he makes career choices?

Language from the audio — match the phrase

Find these six phrases in the transcript and match them to what they DO in a conversation.

"Long queue." — opener — uses a shared situation instead of a question

"Honestly?" — signals a real, unpolished answer is coming

"That's interesting." — keeps the ball in the other person's court

"What about you, what are you working on this quarter?" — specific follow-up — invites a story, not a title

"Mind if I send it over?" — soft, indirect request for permission to follow up

"I'll accept the request." — closes the loop on a next step in one line

Voice A: Long queue. Is this your first time at this conference?

Voice B: Third, actually. You?

Voice A: First. I'm still figuring out which sessions are worth it. What do you do?

Voice B: Honestly? I help companies figure out what their data is actually telling them. On paper I'm a freelance data consultant, but that phrase means nothing to most people.

Voice A: Ha, fair. And how did you end up doing that?

Voice B: I was in-house at a big bank for years. Loved the team, hated the projects. Freelancing gives me more control over which problems I take on.

Voice A: That's interesting. Is it as scary as people say?

Voice B: The scary part isn't the money — it's how much of your time goes into sales instead of the actual work. What about you, what are you working on this quarter?

Voice A: A big redesign of our customer onboarding flow. First-week drop-off is our biggest problem.

Voice B: Oh, I could talk about onboarding metrics all day. I actually wrote a short piece on that recently — mind if I send it over?

Voice A: Please. LinkedIn easier than email?

Voice B: Perfect. I'll accept the request.

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Speaking: role-play — 90 seconds each

Choose *ONE* situation. Introduce yourself in 90 seconds using plain language. Then take turns asking at least three indirect / follow-up questions.

Scene: At a conference coffee break

A: You're at the event for the first time, hoping to find a new job.

B: You're a repeat attendee, currently hiring.

Scene: Before a Zoom kick-off call

A: You're a new consultant joining the client's team.

B: You're the client's project lead, five minutes early.

Scene: At a co-working space kitchen

A: You're a freelancer between contracts.

B: You work at a fast-growing startup nearby.

Writing mini-task

Write a 60–80 word LinkedIn follow-up message to someone you met at an event. Reference something specific they said, use *ONE* indirect question, and suggest a next step.

Wrap-up

One phrase from today you'll use next time you introduce yourself.

One follow-up question you want to remember.

One thing about the case study you'd copy for your own team.

Quiz

1. The most professional way to ask 'What do you do?' is...
 - (A) "What do you do?"
 - (B) "Do you mind if I ask what you do?"
 - (C) "Say your job."
2. Which describes an individual contributor?
 - (A) A team lead with 5 reports
 - (B) Someone who does the work with no direct reports
 - (C) The founder

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3. Choose the correct indirect question.
- (A) Could you tell me where is the room?
 - (B) Could you tell me where the room is?
 - (C) Could you tell me where does the room?
4. "Runway" in a startup context means...
- (A) The airport strip
 - (B) How many months of cash you have left
 - (C) The route to the office
5. Which is the BEST opening question at a networking event?
- (A) What do you do?
 - (B) What are you working on this quarter?
 - (C) How much do you earn?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

Word bank: personable · eloquent · circumspect · proactive · polished · hands-on

1. She's very ____ — she already drafted a plan before anyone asked.

2. Extremely ____ speaker: she explained a complex product in two sentences.

3. He's a ____ leader — he does the work himself, not just delegates.

4. Great slide deck. Very ____, maybe a little too corporate for our team.

5. Try to seem ____ on your first day — smile, ask questions, sit at the shared table.

6. He was quite ____ in the big meeting but much warmer over coffee.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word internal memo to your department regarding a new project lead joining the team. You need to explain why this person was chosen, focusing on their 'proactive' and 'hands-on' approach, while addressing any 'circumspect' initial feedback from the team. Use at least 4 items from the unit's vocabulary.

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id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items.

Maintain a formal, executive register.

Organize with clear paragraph breaks.

Ensure logical flow from introduction to call-to-action.

model: To: Marketing Department From: Sarah Jenkins, Head of Growth Subject: Welcome: New Project Lead for Project Zenith I am delighted to announce that Marcus Thorne will be joining us as Project Lead for Zenith. Marcus stood out during the selection process for his remarkably proactive attitude; he has already submitted a preliminary audit of our current workflows. He is known for being a hands-on leader who prefers direct involvement in execution over high-level delegation. I am aware that some of you have been circumspect regarding his arrival, particularly given his reputation for being very polished and corporate. However, I have found him to be extremely personable and genuinely interested in our team culture. His eloquent presentation of the roadmap convinced the board that he is the right fit. I expect his presence to streamline our delivery significantly. Please join me in welcoming Marcus during our Monday stand-up, where he will share his initial impressions and vision for the project.

2. Present simple or continuous?

Put the verb in brackets in the correct present form.

1. I ____ (work) for a design agency in Berlin.

2. This month we ____ (redesign) the onboarding flow.

3. The CFO ____ (fly) in on the 14th — it's already booked.

4. She usually ____ (chair) the Monday stand-up.

5. We ____ (not / know) the final budget yet.

6. Sorry — I can't chat. I ____ (finish) a client deck for tomorrow.

7. Our team ____ (own) the whole customer journey, not just onboarding.

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3. Routine, project or plan?

Choose the correct label for each sentence.

1. We ship a new release every second Thursday.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
2. I'm running a pilot with three key customers this month.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
3. We're moving to a four-day week from January.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
4. She always answers Slack within 15 minutes.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
5. I'm flying to Warsaw on Monday.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake with present simple or continuous. Rewrite it.

1. I am working for a bank in Madrid — I've been there five years.

2. This week I lead the design review while my manager is on holiday.

3. We are owning the customer relationship from day one.

4. I meet him tomorrow at 3pm — it's confirmed.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. Listening — three first-day observations

Three colleagues describe their first impression of a new team member, Léa. Notice which adjectives they use and whether they mix simple and continuous correctly.

1. Which speaker gives the most EVIDENCE-BASED first impression?

2. Which speaker mixes up present simple and continuous?

3. Which speaker gives a fair 'second-chance' comment?

Voice A: She seemed a bit circumspect on day one, but she's shadowing the team all week, so let's see her in a smaller room before we decide anything.

Voice B: Very eloquent. She summarised the whole discovery deck in about three sentences — I've never seen someone do that on day one.

Voice C: She is knowing the product already. She's asking the right questions. I'm liking her a lot.

6. Writing — a first-impression note

Write a 60–80 word 'first-impression note' about a new colleague (real or invented). Use: (a) at least TWO adjectives from the lesson, (b) ONE sentence in present simple (routine or fact), (c) ONE sentence in present continuous (current project or fixed plan).

7. Case study reflection

Go back to the Bright Lights case (Aditi Rao). Answer briefly, in your own words.

1. In one sentence, what was the FAIREST first impression of Aditi and why?

2. Name ONE concrete first-week activity you'd add to help the team see her properly, and explain why.

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Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: types of networker

1. the hunter
2. the connector
3. the wallflower

Reading: The 90-second rule

1. (B) About 90 seconds
2. (B) It uses only insider labels, not a real problem
3. (B) They ask a specific question and follow up on the answer
4. (A) is heard but not understood or remembered

Vocabulary: job roles, industries & small talk

1. individual contributor
 2. kick off
 3. key stakeholders
 4. commute
 5. cash runway
 6. subject-matter expert
1. She's not a manager yet — she's still an individual contributor.
 2. We're about to kick off a big rebrand project next Monday.
 3. The main key stakeholders on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.
 4. How was your commute this morning — did the metro cooperate?
 5. The startup has about nine months of cash runway before they need to raise again.

Grammar focus: Question formation for networking

1. Do you mind if I ask what you do?
 2. Could you tell me where the breakout room is?
 3. I'd love to know how you got into product management.
 4. Do you know whether your company is hiring right now?
 5. Could I ask what the main challenges in your role are?
1. Could you tell me where the registration desk is?
 2. Who told you about this conference?
 3. Do you know what time the keynote starts?
 4. I was wondering how long you've been working there.
1. Model: "Oh really? What made you decide to go freelance?"
 2. Model: "That's interesting — could you say a bit more about how you chose LATAM first?"
 3. Model: "I'd love to know what you've tried so far."
 4. Model: "How come? What are you working on now?"

Listening: Two strangers at a conference coffee break

1. Plain language: he helps companies figure out what their data is actually telling them.
 2. A big redesign of their customer onboarding flow.
 3. Yes — they swap LinkedIn instead of business cards.
1. He wanted more control over the kinds of problems he worked on.
 2. The amount of time spent on sales, not on the actual work.
 3. To send her a short article he wrote on onboarding metrics.
1. Voice B — she says it's her third time and offers the plain-language self-description with confidence, while Voice A admits it's her first and is still figuring out sessions.
 2. Voice B — he offers a specific next step (send the article) and volunteers a channel (LinkedIn). Follow-through is on him.
 3. He weighs the type of problem more than salary or brand — a values-driven mover, not a status-driven one.

Quiz

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1. (B) "Do you mind if I ask what you do?"
2. (B) Someone who does the work with no direct reports
3. (B) Could you tell me where the room is?
4. (B) How many months of cash you have left
5. (B) What are you working on this quarter?

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Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. proactive
2. eloquent
3. hands-on
4. polished
5. personable
6. circumspect

2. Present simple or continuous?

1. work
2. are redesigning
3. is flying
4. chairs
5. don't know
6. am finishing
7. owns

3. Routine, project or plan?

1. (A) Routine
2. (B) Current project
3. (C) Fixed future plan
4. (A) Routine
5. (C) Fixed future plan

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. I work for a bank in Madrid — I've been there five years.
2. This week I'm leading the design review while my manager is on holiday.
3. We own the customer relationship from day one.
4. I'm meeting him tomorrow at 3pm — it's confirmed.

5. Listening — three first-day observations

1. Speaker 2 — she cites a specific behaviour (Léa summarised a discovery deck in three sentences).
2. Speaker 3 — 'She is knowing the product already' should be 'She already knows the product'.
3. Speaker 1 — 'She seemed a bit circumspect on day one, but she's shadowing the team all week, so let's see her in a smaller room.'

7. Case study reflection

1. Model: sharp and prepared, because it's supported by observed behaviour (the client call), while 'distant' is only based on two short coffees.
2. Model example: a low-stakes lunch with no work agenda, so the team sees her outside the pressure of a client call.

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