



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 10 · B1·10B

Looking back, looking ahead

Theme · Planning ahead

Unit 10 · B1·10B

Looking back, looking ahead

Theme: *Planning ahead*

B1 · Business English



Learning objectives

- Run a short quarterly review in English: what worked, what didn't, what changes for next quarter.
- Use 2nd conditional to reframe past problems as future decisions ('If we started again, we'd...').
- Use six high-frequency review verbs and nouns (retrospective, blocker, lesson learned, follow-up action, deprioritise, sign-off).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Your last quarter in one sentence

Describe the last three months of your work in exactly one sentence each — no adjectives, only verbs and numbers.

The single most useful thing you shipped or finished.

The single thing that took longer than it should have.

The single thing you would do differently if you started the quarter again.

Lead-in: agony aunt · quarterly-review mailbox

Four short letters from real teams heading into a quarterly review. For each, write your ONE-sentence advice in the box, then reveal the model answer.

kind: advice

1. **from:** — Head of Product, 40-person SaaS · **letter:** We hit only 60% of our Q3 roadmap. Nobody wants to say it. Our review is on Monday. Do we call it a miss, or reframe as 'partial success'? ·

model: Call it a miss, honestly, in one sentence — then spend 80% of the review on the ONE change for next quarter. 'Reframing' costs credibility.

2. **from:** — Founder, 12-person agency · **letter:** One of our biggest bets failed completely. I know why. Do I present the postmortem myself, or ask the person who owned it to do it? · **model:** The person who owned it presents — with your public support. Otherwise you rob them of the growth and signal that only leaders can talk about failure.

3. **from:** — Ops Manager, e-commerce · **letter:** Every retro turns into a blame session. People stop being honest by minute 20. What ONE rule would you add? · **model:** Rule: talk about SYSTEMS not PEOPLE. Replace 'X was late' with 'our handoff between design and dev has no owner'. Cuts blame in half.

4. **from:** — Team Lead, 6-person data team · **letter:** My CEO wants us to plan the next 12 months. My team can barely plan the next 4 weeks. Where do I start? · **model:** Start with the quarter, not the year. 90 days is the longest horizon a team can plan without losing touch with reality. The year is a rough map, not a contract.

followUp: Which letter is closest to a real situation on YOUR team? Explain in one sentence.

Reading · The 45-minute quarterly review

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



A good quarterly review takes 45 minutes and answers three questions: what did we do, what did we learn, what changes for next quarter. It should NOT be a two-hour slide-fest, a self-congratulation session, or a search for someone to blame.

The first 15 minutes are data. Not opinions — data. Every team brings ONE slide: three numbers, one lesson, one follow-up action. If your slide has more than five lines of text, you haven't done the work.

The middle 15 minutes are the honest conversation. Not 'what went well' (everyone lies), but 'if we started this quarter again, what would we do differently?'. This is where 2nd conditional does the real work. 'If we'd hired the designer in April, we would have shipped v2 in July, not September.'

The last 15 minutes are the ONE change. Not five changes, not a new strategy — one specific change to the way you work, decided in the room, owned by one person, reviewed at the next retrospective. If you leave the meeting with ten follow-up actions, you'll do zero.

Companies that run this meeting well pay a lot less for consultants, because their teams already know what's broken and how to fix it.

1. How long should a good quarterly review take?
 - (A) Fifteen minutes
 - (B) Forty-five minutes
 - (C) Half a day
2. What does each team bring for the data section?
 - (A) A deck of ten slides
 - (B) One slide with three numbers, one lesson, one follow-up
 - (C) A full quarterly report
3. How many changes should the meeting produce?
 - (A) Zero
 - (B) One
 - (C) Ten

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to the meaning.

a retrospective (retro) — a meeting to review what happened and improve

a follow-up action — a specific task decided at a meeting

a self-congratulation session — a meeting where people only say positive things

a search for someone to blame — a meeting where people look for a person at fault

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The middle 15 minutes are for 'what went well'.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
2. The meeting should produce one specific change.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
3. The reviewer takes notes on paper.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
4. Companies that run this well spend less on consultants.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
5. Slides should have at most five lines of text.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given

React to the text

Discuss briefly.

1. In your company, is the quarterly review 45 minutes or two hours?

2. Would asking 'if we started again, what would we do differently?' be normal or too direct on your team?

Scan for meaning

Find the phrase in the text that matches each definition.

1. the honest hypothetical question to ask in the middle 15 minutes

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2. a meeting where people only say positive things

3. one specific change to the way you work

Vocabulary · Six review verbs and nouns

a retrospective (retro) — a meeting to review and improve

a blocker — a friction point stopping the work from progressing

a lesson learned — a fact from the past you'll act on next time

a follow-up action — a task decided at the meeting

sign-off — the final approval before a decision goes live

a postmortem — an honest analysis after something failed

to deprioritise — to move something OFF the plan

to escalate — to push a problem to a higher decision-maker

to unblock — to remove what's stopping progress

to sign off (on) — to formally approve

to reprioritise — to change the order of importance

to close the loop — to send a final update so nothing is left open

practice

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

1. The biggest ____ in Q3 was legal approvals — everything else waited on them.

2. We need the CEO's ____ before we announce the price change.

3. I've been trying to ____ this ticket for two weeks — I have to escalate.

4. One clear ____: never launch a new feature the week of a big campaign.

5. Please ____ your action items in the meeting notes so we can track them.

6. After the outage, we ran a full ____ on Friday afternoon.

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Collocations · review phrases

Match the verb with the noun.

run — a retrospective

unblock — the team

capture — a lesson learned

sign off on — the plan

escalate — a blocker

close — the loop

Odd one out

Choose the word that does NOT belong.

1. retro · postmortem · lesson learned · onboarding

(A) retro

(B) postmortem

(C) lesson learned

(D) onboarding

2. blocker · bottleneck · milestone · escalation

(A) blocker

(B) bottleneck

(C) milestone

(D) escalation

3. sign off · approve · unblock · resign

(A) sign off

(B) approve

(C) unblock

(D) resign

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair.

1. to review → a ____

2. to escalate → an ____

3. to approve → an ____

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4. to plan → a ____

5. to deliver → a ____



Grammar · 2nd conditional to review the past and shape the future

- 1. Use 2nd conditional to make hindsight less painful** — • 'If we started this quarter again, we would hire the designer in April.' • Softer than 'we should have hired the designer in April'.
- 2. Combine 2nd conditional with a specific number for credibility** — • 'If we had two more sales reps, we'd close 30% more pipeline.' • Numbers force honesty — no fluff.
- 3. Question form: 'What would happen if...?'** — • 'What would happen if we deprioritised Germany for two quarters?' • Great for kicking off a decision without pushing your view first.
- 4. 'Would rather' + past simple = polite preference** — • 'I'd rather we finished v2 before starting v3.' • 'They'd rather we escalated the blocker to Sofia this week.'
- 5. Avoid mixing 'will' and 'would' in the same sentence** — • ✗ 'If we hired, we will ship earlier.' • ✓ 'If we hired, we would ship earlier.'

Exercise A — 2nd conditional in review sentences

Put the verbs in the correct form.

1. If we (start) again, we (bring) legal in on day one.

2. If we (have) a real project manager, the launch (not slip) by three weeks.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. If Sofia (own) the ticket, it (be) done by now.

4. What (happen) if we (deprioritise) Germany for two quarters?

5. I (rather) we (finish) v2 before starting v3.

Exercise B — rewrite the criticism as a 2nd conditional

Turn each direct criticism into a softer 'if...would' sentence.

1. You didn't tell us about the risk early enough.

2. Legal always blocks everything.

3. The team is too small for the plan.

4. Marketing doesn't understand product.

Exercise C — 'would rather' + past simple

Rewrite each preference using 'would rather + past simple'.

1. I prefer to escalate the blocker on Monday.

2. The team prefers to finish v2 before starting v3.

3. The CEO prefers a 45-minute review, not a 2-hour one.

Exercise D — 'what would happen if...?' questions

Write ONE 'what would happen if...?' question for each meeting.

1. Quarterly review, missed 40% of the roadmap.

2. Hiring review, budget for two roles, three teams asking.

3. Sales review, pipeline down 20%.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise E — your own retrospective slide

Write your own ONE-slide quarterly review in FIVE lines. Line 1: 3 numbers. Line 2: 1 lesson learned. Line 3: 1 follow-up action + owner + date. Line 4: 1 blocker to escalate. Line 5: 1 sentence in 2nd conditional starting with 'If we started this quarter again, we would...'.

1. Prompt: you're the head of a 5-person marketing team at a Portuguese e-commerce brand.
-

Listening · Two teams, one quarterly review

Two team leads present the same quarter to the same CEO. Same numbers, very different tone. Listen and decide which team will improve next quarter and which one will repeat the same mistakes.

pre

In your last review, was the honesty level 3/10 or 8/10?

What is the ONE sentence you'd like to hear from your boss at the start of a review?

gist

1. Which team lead opens with numbers, and which opens with excuses?
-
-

2. Which team lead names ONE specific change for next quarter?
-
-

3. Which team lead uses 2nd conditional to review the past honestly?
-
-

detail

1. What specific numbers does Team B report?
-
-

2. What is Team B's ONE follow-up action for next quarter?
-
-

3. Why does Team A's review lose the CEO?
-
-

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is *IMPLIED*.

1. Why does Team B's honesty about the miss increase, not decrease, the CEO's trust?

2. What should Team A do BEFORE the next quarterly review?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"We hit 92% of the roadmap and missed the €1.5M target by 4%." — opens with the honest number

"If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks." — reviews the past with a specific 2nd/3rd conditional

"We're deprioritising Germany and giving that budget to content in Portugal and Spain." — one specific change with an owner and a budget

"It's been a difficult quarter for the whole industry." — opens with an excuse (loses trust)

"We're going to look at everything and come back with a plan." — vague follow-up (no owner, no date)

Team A lead: So, look, it's been a difficult quarter for the whole industry. The macro is tough, the competitors are aggressive, and honestly the team has been under a lot of pressure. We're proud of the work we've done. We're going to look at everything and come back with a plan for next quarter. Any questions?

Team B lead: Quick review. Three numbers: revenue €1.44M — target was €1.5M, so 4% short. CAC €55 — target was €50, 10% over. NPS 52, target was 45, so 7 points up. One lesson: if we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks. One change: we're deprioritising Germany this quarter and moving the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain — Sofia owns it, weekly check-in for the first six weeks. And one thing I need from you: sign-off by Friday, because contracts start Monday.

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Complete the exact phrases from the audio.

1. Revenue €1.44M — target was €1.5M, so ____% short.

2. If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would ____ slipped the launch by three weeks.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. We're ____ Germany this quarter and moving the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain.

4. One thing I need from you: sign-off ____ Friday.

5. It's been a ____ quarter for the whole industry.

Speaking · Run your own 5-minute review

In pairs. Student A: run a 3-minute review of a real (or invented) recent quarter. Structure: 3 numbers · 1 lesson · 1 change · 1 sentence using 2nd conditional ('If we started again, we'd...'). Student B: listen and ask the ONE follow-up question you'd want the CEO to ask.

Scene: Role 1 — Marketing lead, missed the pipeline target by 15%

A: You: the marketing lead. Open with the number. Use ONE 2nd conditional to review the miss.

B: You: the CFO. Ask: 'What would you do differently if the budget were 20% smaller next quarter?'

Scene: Role 2 — Product lead, shipped v2 but with three known bugs

A: You: the product lead. Own the trade-off. Say the ONE thing you'd change.

B: You: the CEO. Ask: 'If we froze the roadmap for four weeks, what would you fix first?'

Scene: Role 3 — Ops lead, one big customer nearly churned

A: You: the ops lead. Explain what you learned and what changes.

B: You: the founder. Ask: 'If the same customer signalled churn tomorrow, who owns the first response?'

Class discussion

Discuss briefly.

In your culture, is admitting a miss in front of leadership seen as strength or weakness?

What's the ONE thing you'd change about how your team runs its review?

Would 'if we started again, we'd...' feel natural on your team, or too raw?

Role-play · the polite disagreement

Student A proposes a change. Student B disagrees politely, using 'would rather' + past simple. Then A reacts with a 2nd conditional.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Scene: 'Let's drop the German launch next quarter.'

A: Student A: propose the drop with ONE reason.

B: Student B: 'I'd rather we ran a smaller German launch than dropped it entirely — if we did that, we'd keep the pipeline alive at 30% of the cost.'

Scene: 'Let's freeze all hiring for six months.'

A: Student A: propose the freeze.

B: Student B: 'I'd rather we froze senior hires and kept the two junior roles — if we did that, margin would still improve without slowing product.'

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: retrospective · blocker · lesson learned · follow-up action · sign-off · postmortem

1. We ran a proper ____ the Friday after the outage.

2. Legal approvals are the biggest ____ this quarter.

3. Every ____ ends with one owner and one date.

4. We need the CEO's ____ before we can announce the change.

5. One clear ____: never launch a feature the same week as a big campaign.

6. The quarterly ____ takes 45 minutes, not two hours.

2. 2nd conditional in review sentences

Put the verbs in the correct form.

1. If we (start) again, we (bring) legal in on day one.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. If we (have) a real project manager, the launch (not slip) by three weeks.

3. If Sofia (own) the ticket, it (be) done by now.

4. What (happen) if we (deprioritise) Germany for two quarters?

5. I (rather) we (finish) v2 before starting v3.

3. Which review answer is stronger?

Choose the answer that would build MORE trust with a CEO or investor.

1. 'How did the quarter go?'

(A) 'It's been a difficult quarter for the whole industry.'

(B) 'We hit 92% of the roadmap and missed the €1.5M target by 4%.'

(C) 'We're really proud of the team.'

2. 'What did you learn?'

(A) 'We learned a lot.'

(B) 'If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks.'

(C) 'Every quarter is a lesson.'

3. 'What's changing next quarter?'

(A) 'We're going to look at everything and come back with a plan.'

(B) 'We're deprioritising Germany and moving the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain.'

(C) 'We'll be more strategic.'

4. 'Any blockers to escalate?'

(A) 'A few, but we're managing.'

(B) 'Yes: no design bandwidth for the January push — needs Sofia's sign-off on a freelancer by Friday.'

(C) 'It's fine.'

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. If we had a real PM, the launch will not slip.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. I would rather we finish v2 before starting v3.

3. What would happen if we would deprioritise Germany?

4. If I was the CEO, I sign off on the freelancer today.

5. Listening — two teams, one quarterly review

Two team leads present the same numbers to the same CEO. Who improves next quarter, who repeats the same mistakes?

1. Who opens with numbers, who opens with excuses?

2. Who names ONE specific change with an owner and a date?

3. Who uses 2nd conditional to review the past honestly?

Team A lead: So, look, it's been a difficult quarter for the whole industry. The macro is tough, the competitors are aggressive, and the team has been under a lot of pressure. We're proud of the work we've done. We're going to look at everything and come back with a plan for next quarter. Any questions?

Team B lead: Quick review. Three numbers: revenue €1.44M — 4% short of target. CAC €55, 10% over. NPS 52, 7 points up. One lesson: if we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks. One change: we're deprioritising Germany and moving the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain — Sofia owns it, weekly check-in. And one ask: sign-off by Friday, contracts start Monday.

6. Writing — your own ONE-slide review

Write your own quarterly review in FIVE lines. Line 1: 3 numbers. Line 2: 1 lesson learned. Line 3: 1 follow-up action + owner + date. Line 4: 1 blocker to escalate. Line 5: 1 sentence starting with 'If we started this quarter again, we would...'

7. Case study preview

Before Case Study 10, answer briefly.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. You're helping a family business write the ONE change for next year. What's the ONE question you'd ask the founder before you start?

2. The founder disagrees with your recommended #1 bet. How do you argue?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Reading · The 45-minute quarterly review

1. (B) Forty-five minutes
2. (B) One slide with three numbers, one lesson, one follow-up
3. (B) One
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (C) Not Given
4. (A) True
5. (A) True
1. Model: two hours, with 40 slides. The 45-minute version would feel almost impolite — and much more useful.
2. Model: too direct in most European corporate cultures — but healthier than 'what went well'.
1. 'if we started this quarter again, what would we do differently?'
2. a self-congratulation session
3. the ONE change

Vocabulary · Six review verbs and nouns

1. blocker
2. sign-off
3. unblock
4. lesson learned
5. close the loop
6. postmortem
1. (D) onboarding
2. (C) milestone
3. (D) resign
1. review / reviewer
2. escalation
3. approval
4. plan / planner / planning
5. delivery / deliverable

Grammar · 2nd conditional to review the past and shape the future

1. started · would bring
2. had · would not slip
3. owned · would be
4. would happen · deprioritised
5. would rather · finished
1. If we had known about the risk earlier, we would have re-planned the sprint.
2. If we brought legal in at the start of each project, the sign-off wouldn't be a blocker at the end.
3. If the team were two people bigger, we would ship the plan without cutting quality.
4. If marketing and product ran one shared retro per quarter, briefs would be much cleaner.
1. I'd rather we escalated the blocker on Monday.
2. The team would rather we finished v2 before starting v3.
3. The CEO would rather we ran a 45-minute review, not a 2-hour one.
1. 'What would happen if we cut the roadmap in half and shipped 100% of what's left?'
2. 'What would happen if we hired zero people this quarter and freed the budget for freelancers?'
3. 'What would happen if we called every closed-lost from Q1 personally in the next two weeks?'
1. Model: Numbers: revenue €1.4M (target €1.5M · -7%). CAC €48 (target €40 · -20%). Email list 32k (+12%). Lesson: paid social CAC keeps rising above target when we don't run any organic campaign in parallel. Action: launch weekly LinkedIn series · owner: Ana · start 5 Jan · first check 15 Feb. Blocker to escalate: no design bandwidth for the January push — needs Sofia's sign-off on a freelancer. If we started this quarter again, we would run one organic campaign per month from the first week — not from month two.

Listening · Two teams, one quarterly review

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Team B opens with numbers ('hit 92% of the roadmap, missed the €1.5M target by 4%'). Team A opens with context ('it's been a difficult quarter for the whole industry...').
2. Team B — 'We're deprioritising Germany and giving that budget to content in Portugal and Spain.'
3. Team B — 'If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks.'
1. 'Revenue €1.44M (target €1.5M, -4%). CAC €55 (target €50, +10%). NPS 52 (target 45, +7 pts).'
2. 'Deprioritise Germany, move the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain, weekly check-in for the first six weeks.'
3. No numbers in the first two minutes, three excuses, no ONE change. The CEO knows the meeting was performative, not real.
1. Because the number is small (-4%) and the response is specific. Honesty + a plan is safer than 'we hit everything'.
2. Write the one-page plan for Q1 first, so the review is against a plan they actually made, not against post-hoc goals.
1. 4
2. not have
3. deprioritising
4. by
5. difficult

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. postmortem
2. blocker
3. follow-up action
4. sign-off
5. lesson learned
6. retrospective

2. 2nd conditional in review sentences

1. started · would bring
2. had · would not slip
3. owned · would be
4. would happen · deprioritised
5. would rather · finished

3. Which review answer is stronger?

1. (B) 'We hit 92% of the roadmap and missed the €1.5M target by 4%.'
2. (B) 'If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks.'
3. (B) 'We're deprioritising Germany and moving the €80k budget to content in Portugal and Spain.'
4. (B) 'Yes: no design bandwidth for the January push — needs Sofia's sign-off on a freelancer by Friday.'

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. If we had a real PM, the launch would not slip. ('would' not 'will')
2. I would rather we finished v2 before starting v3. (past simple after 'would rather')
3. What would happen if we deprioritised Germany? (no 'would' in the IF clause)
4. If I were the CEO, I would sign off on the freelancer today.

5. Listening — two teams, one quarterly review

1. Team B → numbers ('92% of the roadmap, missed €1.5M by 4%'). Team A → context ('difficult quarter for the industry').
2. Team B — 'deprioritise Germany, move €80k to content in PT/ES, Sofia owns it, weekly check-in for six weeks'.
3. Team B — 'If we had brought legal in at the start of April, we would not have slipped the launch by three weeks.'

7. Case study preview

1. Model: 'If you could keep ONE thing exactly as it is today, and change everything else, what would you keep?' — the answer reveals the real priority.
2. Model: with ONE 2nd conditional and ONE number — 'if we tested it in one region for one quarter, we'd know by June whether it works, at €30k risk. Full launch waits on that test.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class