APEX ENGLISH
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B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 7 · B7A

Reading the room

Theme · Negotiation

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Reading the room

Theme: Negotiation

Learning objectives

- Diagnose what the other side actually wants — position vs interest.
- Use past modals (must have / might have / should have) to reason about what happened in the room.
- Know your BATNA before you walk in — and name it out loud when asked.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Class Book

Warm-up · The last time you lost

Think about the last negotiation you didn't win — a raise, a client, a contract, a price. In 45 seconds out loud: what did you ASK for, and what do you now think the OTHER side actually wanted? Then record a 30-second voice note.

What was your ask (the POSITION)?

What do you now think their INTEREST was — the thing behind the ask?

What would you say differently if you walked in again on Monday?

Bonus: were you ever going to walk away — or were they the only option?

Lead-in: position or interest?

Read four things someone said in a negotiation. Decide: is it a POSITION (the specific ask) or an INTEREST (the reason behind the ask)?

1. 'We need this priced at €40k or we walk.'

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2. 'I need to show my board a win by end of quarter.'

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3. 'The delivery has to be before March 31st.'

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4. 'We don't want to lose the two senior engineers on this project.'

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followUp: In your last negotiation: what POSITION did they take — and what INTEREST behind it might you have missed?

POSITION

INTEREST

Reading: Position, interest, BATNA — the three things you need in the room

Every negotiation has two layers. On top is the POSITION — the specific thing the other side says they want ('€40k', 'March 31st', '12 months, not 24'). Underneath is the INTEREST — the reason they want it ('my CFO gave me a €50k budget and I need to come in under', 'our biggest renewal is April 1st', 'we don't trust you enough for two years yet'). Junior negotiators fight over positions. Senior negotiators dig for interests. The difference matters because positions are usually zero-sum — if I pay you €40k I have €40k less — but interests almost always contain a creative deal that lets both sides win. You can't offer a save-face concession, or a named-team lock-in, or an early-March go-live, if you never asked why the number, the length, or the date.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

The grammar for reasoning about what happened in the room is past modals. 'She MUST HAVE been briefed by the CFO' — near certainty, based on evidence you saw. 'They MIGHT HAVE been bluffing about the deadline' — possibility, not certainty. 'We SHOULD HAVE asked for their budget upfront' — regret about a past decision you now think was wrong. 'We COULDN'T HAVE known they were talking to a competitor' — impossibility given what you knew at the time. These are the four tools of the post-negotiation debrief; if you can't use them, your team learns nothing from the deal you just lost.

The third thing you need before you sit down is your BATNA — Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. It's the answer to 'what do I do if this deal falls apart?'. A strong BATNA ('we already have a signed offer from their competitor at 90% of the price') lets you be calm, patient and specific in the room. A weak BATNA ('this is our only option and we need it by Friday') makes you concede too early, too much. The hardest sentence in any negotiation is 'that doesn't work for us — thank you for your time'. You can only say it if you actually have a Plan B. Walking in without a BATNA isn't negotiating; it's begging with a tie on.

1. POSITION is…
   - (A) The reason behind the ask
   - (B) The specific thing the other side says they want
   - (C) Your fallback plan
2. INTEREST is…
   - (A) The specific ask on the table
   - (B) The reason behind the position — usually where the creative deal lives
   - (C) The same as BATNA
3. 'She must have been briefed by the CFO' expresses…
   - (A) Regret about a past action
   - (B) Near certainty about a past event, based on evidence
   - (C) A possible future action
4. A strong BATNA lets you…
   - (A) Concede early
   - (B) Be calm, patient and specific in the room — and walk away credibly
   - (C) Avoid negotiating

Vocabulary in context

Match the negotiation term to its plain-English meaning.

position — the specific ask the other side puts on the table

interest — the reason behind the position — where creative deals live

BATNA — your best alternative if this deal falls apart

concession — something you give up in the negotiation to move it forward

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

trade-off — you give up X in exchange for Y — both sides move

walk-away point — the number / term below which you leave the room

Vocabulary: positions, interests, BATNA, and moves in the room

opening offer — the initial number/term put on the table

counter-offer — your response — a different number/term, not a yes/no

anchor (v.) — set the first number in the room, deliberately, to shape the range

reservation price — the number past which you refuse to deal (private, not shared)

BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) — your Plan B — what you'll do if this deal falls apart. A strong BATNA lets you walk away credibly.

ZOPA (zone of possible agreement) — the overlap between both sides' walk-away points

dig for the why — ask questions until you find the interest behind the position

save-face concession — give the other side something they can report as a win

creative deal — an agreement that solves for interests, not positions

underlying motive — the genuine rationale behind the stated ask

read between the lines — pick up what they mean, not what they said

test the waters — float an idea to see how they react before committing

leave room to move — don't state your final position as your first position

call their bluff — act as if their ultimatum isn't real — because you think it isn't

hold your line — refuse to budge on a specific term, calmly and repeatedly

walk away (from the deal) — leave the negotiation because your BATNA is better

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. Don't take €40k as their final number — that's their ___ ___, not their walk-away point.

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2. Before you go in, know your ___ — what you do if it falls apart. Otherwise you'll concede too early.

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3. Give them a ___-___ ___: let them tell their boss they won on payment terms while we won on price.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

4. The 'March 31st' deadline felt like theatre — I'd ___ ___ ___ if I had a stronger fallback.

5. We don't have to say yes today. Let's ___ ___ ___ ___ with the smaller version first.

6. That's below our ___ ___ — we walk.

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. Don't take €40k as their final number — that's their <u>initial number on the table</u>.

2. Before you go in, know your <u>best alternative if the deal falls apart</u>.

3. Give them <u>something they can report as a win</u>: let them win on payment terms while we win on price.

4. The March 31st deadline felt like theatre — I'd have <u>acted as if their ultimatum wasn't real</u> with a stronger fallback.

5. That's below our <u>number past which we refuse to deal</u> — we walk.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short debrief memo to your sales leadership summarising a lost negotiation, distinguishing position from interest and naming your BATNA failure.

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: Debrief — Lost €280k Deal Their position was €260k, final. Their interest was almost certainly protecting the CFO's promise to the board, not the value of the work — they never pushed back on scope, only price. They must have already agreed internally before our second call; the 48-hour silence after our €275k offer supports that. We should have asked for their budget cap during discovery, not guessed at it in the offer. We also negotiated without a real BATNA — we had three other late-stage deals but treated this as our only option, so they smelled it and held their line. Recommendation: build a BATNA check into every deal review before the final offer stage.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Grammar focus: Past modals (must have / might have / should have)

1. MUST HAVE + past participle — near-certainty about the past — 'She MUST HAVE been briefed by the CFO before the call — she quoted our exact budget cap.' 'They MUST HAVE known about the competitor bid — they didn't push back on price at all.' Use when you have evidence and you're confident about the conclusion. Negative form for near-certain 'no': CAN'T HAVE / COULDN'T HAVE — 'she can't have made that up; the numbers matched too precisely'.

2. MIGHT HAVE / MAY HAVE / COULD HAVE — possibility about the past — 'They MIGHT HAVE been bluffing about the March deadline.' 'She MAY HAVE walked out because she had a better offer waiting.' 'The CFO COULD HAVE overruled her — that would explain the sudden change.' Use when you're speculating, not concluding. All three are near-synonyms; 'might' is safest and most common in spoken business.

3. SHOULD HAVE / SHOULDN'T HAVE — regret / criticism about the past — 'We SHOULD HAVE asked for their budget upfront.' (…we didn't; I now think we were wrong not to) 'You SHOULDN'T HAVE offered the discount so early.' (…you did; I think it was a mistake) Use in debriefs: 'what should we have done differently?' is the single most useful sentence after a negotiation, win or lose.

4. Common traps — • 'She should of asked' ✗ — this is a spelling of the SOUND, not the grammar. Always 'should HAVE' / 'should've'. • Tense mismatch: 'They might have been' (past) vs 'they might be' (present possibility). Past modals only for the past. • Over-using 'should have' in a debrief kills psychological safety — mix in 'we could have', 'we might have' to invite thinking, not blame.

Exercise A — Choose the correct past modal

Complete each sentence with must have / might have / should have (or the negative).

1. (Near certainty) They ___ ___ (know) about the competitor bid — they didn't blink at our number.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

2. (Regret / criticism) We ___ ___ (ask) for their budget in the discovery call, not in the offer.

3. (Possibility) She ___ ___ (be) bluffing about walking away — hard to tell.

4. (Near-certain 'no') He ___ ___ (see) the pricing deck before the meeting — his questions were basic.

5. (Criticism, second person) You ___ ___ (offer) the discount so early — it anchored the whole conversation low.

6. (Possibility) The CFO ___ ___ (override) her at the last minute — that would explain the sudden shift.

Exercise B — Debrief the deal

You just lost a deal. Rewrite each blunt debrief line using a past modal to be more precise about the type of claim.

1. 'They lied about the deadline.'

2. 'We asked for too little.'

3. 'She had another offer, obviously.'

4. 'We should have walked.'

Exercise C — Position, interest, past modal

For each situation, answer in TWO sentences. Sentence 1: name their POSITION and your best guess at their INTEREST. Sentence 2: use ONE past modal to reason about what happened.

1. A client insisted on €40k, not €50k, and refused to budge on the number.

2. A supplier gave you a 'sign by Friday or the price goes up 15%' deadline.

3. A candidate accepted a lower salary than you expected, without negotiating.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Listening: three post-deal debriefs — same negotiation, three read-outs

You're a Chief Revenue Officer. Yesterday your team lost a €280k software deal to a smaller competitor. Three of your reps were in the room. You're listening to their post-deal debriefs to decide who to promote to lead the next big negotiation. You're not looking for who's right — you're looking for who can THINK about what happened, using past modals well and reading past position to interest.

pre

Which speaker do you predict will win the promotion — and what will win it?

Think about a deal YOU lost. What was their POSITION — and what do you now think their INTEREST was?

gist

1. Which speaker gets the promotion, and why?

2. Which speaker blames the client and learns nothing?

3. Which speaker is warm and self-critical but too vague to act on?

detail

1. What POSITION did the client hold, and what INTEREST does Marta think was actually behind it?

2. What SPECIFIC past-modal debrief line does Marta land — the one that shows she can reason about what happened?

3. What BATNA failure does Marta name — and Ravi and Kwame don't?

Third listen — debrief craft

Focus on HOW each speaker thinks. Answer from what they DO, not what they say.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

1. Marta uses past modals with real precision ('must have', 'should have', 'couldn't have'). What does that give her that Ravi and Kwame don't have?

2. Ravi's debrief has an emotional cost — even beyond the promotion question. What is it?

3. Kwame is likeable and self-critical. Why is that still worse than useful for a CRO?

Language from the audio — post-deal moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"Their €260k was theatre — the real number was the CFO's promise to the board." — separates position from interest — where the actual constraint lived

"They must have already agreed internally on the number before our second call." — past-modal near-certainty from behavioural evidence — precise, not accusatory

"We should have asked for their budget in the discovery call, not in the offer." — actionable regret — an explicit change to a repeatable process

"We couldn't have known about the competitor — but we should have assumed they were talking to someone." — separates what was knowable from what was inferable — protects the team from unfair hindsight

"They lied about the budget." — accusation that closes off learning — the client becomes the villain, so nothing WE could have done

"Honestly, we could have been sharper." — vague self-blame — feels humble, produces no next-Monday change

Voice A (Ravi): Look, they lied to us. They said their budget was €280k in the discovery call and then came back with €260k as a floor. That was never real — they'd already decided to go with the competitor before our second meeting, I'm sure of it. There's nothing we could have done differently; they were negotiating in bad faith the whole way through. We should stop working with clients who don't respect our process.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Voice B (Marta): OK, let me try to separate what we know from what we're guessing. The €260k number wasn't real in the sense that the deal was worth more than that to them — but it was real in the sense that their CFO had promised the board a specific number under €270k. So the €260k was theatre; the interest was the CFO not losing face. Evidence: they never pushed back on scope, only on price, and there was a 48-hour silence after we offered €275k, which is when she must have been re-briefing her CFO. Now — where WE went wrong. Number one: we should have asked for their budget cap in the discovery call, not tried to guess it in the offer. Number two: we couldn't have known they were also talking to the competitor, but we should have ASSUMED they were and priced for it. Number three, and this is the big one — we treated this deal as our only option in Q4. It wasn't. We had three other late-stage deals. We negotiated like we had no BATNA, so they smelled it, and the €260k floor became our concession point when it should have been our walk-away point.

Voice C (Kwame): Yeah, tough one. I mean, honestly, we probably could have done more — we could have been sharper on a few things. It's on all of us, really, not just one person. The client was tricky, but we knew that going in. We should probably do better next time. I don't want to point fingers, we all could have handled it differently. Yeah.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second post-deal debrief

Solo task. Pick ONE negotiation you were part of in the last 6 months — won or lost. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) debriefing it. You MUST include: (1) their POSITION vs their INTEREST, named separately, (2) TWO past modals used correctly — one 'must have' (near-certainty from evidence), one 'should have' (actionable regret), (3) ONE 'couldn't have known' line that separates what was knowable from what was inferable, (4) explicit naming of YOUR BATNA at the time — strong, weak, or non-existent, (5) ONE specific move you'll change on the next deal.

Scene: Your real recent deal (recommended)

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: your manager, on the Monday morning after.

Scene: A salary negotiation you were part of

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: a mentor who's asking you what you'd do differently next time.

Scene: A client / supplier renegotiation mid-project

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: your project team, who need the lesson for the next contract.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the interest we missed'

Compress the whole debrief to ONE sentence — the interest you now think was really driving the other side. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'Their POSITION was ___, but the INTEREST behind it must have been ___ — because ___.'

Writing mini-task

Write the 4-sentence post-deal debrief (max 80 words). Sentence 1: POSITION vs INTEREST. Sentence 2: one 'must have' — near-certainty from evidence. Sentence 3: one 'should have' — the actionable change. Sentence 4: your BATNA at the time, honestly named — strong, weak or non-existent.

Wrap-up

One position from a recent negotiation, and the interest you now think was behind it.

One past-modal debrief sentence you'll use next Monday — precise, not accusatory.

One BATNA question you'll answer BEFORE you walk into your next negotiation.

Quiz

1. 'She must have been briefed by the CFO' expresses…
   - (A) Regret
   - (B) Near certainty from evidence about the past
   - (C) A future possibility
2. 'We should have asked for their budget upfront' expresses…
   - (A) Certainty about what they did
   - (B) Regret / actionable criticism about a past decision
   - (C) A polite request
3. The POSITION in a negotiation is…
   - (A) The reason behind the ask
   - (B) The specific ask on the table
   - (C) Your fallback plan
4. The INTEREST is…
   - (A) The specific ask on the table
   - (B) The reason behind the position — usually where creative deals live
   - (C) The same as BATNA
5. Your BATNA is…
   - (A) Your opening offer
   - (B) Your best alternative if this deal falls apart — the source of your walk-away power
   - (C) The other side's walk-away point

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Workbook — home practice

Exercise 1 — Negotiation lexis

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase from the box.

Word bank: opening offer · BATNA · save-face concession · call their bluff · test the waters · reservation price

1. Don't take €40k as their final number — that's their ___ ___, not their walk-away point.
2. Before you go in, know your ___ — otherwise you'll concede too early.
3. Give them a ___-___ ___: let them win on payment terms while we win on price.
4. The 'March 31st' deadline felt like theatre — I'd ___ ___ ___ if I had a stronger fallback.
5. We don't have to say yes today. Let's ___ ___ ___ with the smaller version first.
6. That's below our ___ ___ — we walk.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a strategy memo (120–180 words) for your team ahead of a high-stakes vendor renewal negotiation. Outline the approach and the boundaries. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: opening offer, BATNA, save-face concession, call their bluff, test the waters, or reservation price.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, executive register suitable for a strategic memo.

Use conditional forms (e.g., 'If they propose X, we should Y').

Structure clearly: Objective, Negotiation Strategy, Fallback Position.

model: Subject: Strategic Approach for Upcoming Vendor Renewal To the Procurement Team, Regarding the upcoming renewal with our primary infrastructure provider, we must approach the negotiation with a clear understanding of our BATNA. While the supplier’s opening offer represents a 15% increase, we should not treat this as a finality. I suggest we test the waters by proposing a multi-year lock-in at the current rate before we reveal our true reservation price. If they insist on the price hike, we may need to call their bluff by highlighting the competitive landscape, though we should be prepared to offer a save-face concession—such as a shorter termination notice—to keep the relationship amicable. Our goal is to secure the services without overextending the budget. We must remain disciplined; if the final terms fall below our walk-away point, we are prepared to transition to our secondary provider immediately.

Exercise 2 — Past modals

Complete each sentence with must have / might have / should have (or the negative).

1. (Near certainty) They ___ ___ (know) about the competitor bid — they didn't blink at our number.

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2. (Regret) We ___ ___ (ask) for their budget in the discovery call, not in the offer.

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3. (Possibility) She ___ ___ (be) bluffing about walking away — hard to tell.

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4. (Near-certain 'no') He ___ ___ (see) the pricing deck before the meeting — his questions were basic.

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5. (Criticism) You ___ ___ (offer) the discount so early — it anchored us low.

---

6. (Possibility) The CFO ___ ___ (override) her at the last minute.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise 3 — Position or interest?

Decide whether each sentence expresses a POSITION or an INTEREST.

1. 'We need this priced at €40k or we walk.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST
2. 'I need to show my board a win by end of quarter.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST
3. 'The delivery has to be before March 31st.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST
4. 'We don't want to lose the two senior engineers on this project.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST
5. 'We want a 12-month contract, not 24.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST
6. 'My CFO gave me a €50k budget and I want to look good.'
   (A) POSITION
   (B) INTEREST

Exercise 4 — Debrief with past modals

Rewrite each blunt debrief line using a past modal to be more precise.

1. 'They lied about the deadline.'

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2. 'We asked for too little.'

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3. 'She had another offer, obviously.'

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4. 'We should have walked.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise 5 — Three post-deal debriefs

You'll hear three reps debrief the same lost deal. Decide who to promote to lead the next big negotiation.

1. Which speaker gets the promotion?

2. Which speaker blames the client and learns nothing?

3. Which speaker is warm but too vague to act on?

Voice A (Ravi): They lied to us. They said their budget was €280k and came back with €260k as a floor. They'd already decided to go with the competitor before our second meeting. Nothing we could have done.

Voice B (Marta): The €260k wasn't real in the sense of value — but real in the sense that their CFO had promised the board a number under €270k. So the €260k was theatre; the interest was the CFO not losing face. Where we went wrong: we should have asked for their budget cap in the discovery call, not tried to guess it in the offer. We couldn't have known they were also talking to the competitor, but we should have assumed they were. And — the big one — we treated this deal as our only option in Q4. It wasn't. We negotiated like we had no BATNA, so they smelled it.

Voice C (Kwame): Yeah, tough one. Honestly, we probably could have done more, could have been sharper on a few things. It's on all of us. Client was tricky. We should probably do better next time. Yeah.

Exercise 6 — Write your post-deal debrief

Pick ONE negotiation from the last 6 months. Write the 4-sentence debrief (max 80 words). Sentence 1: POSITION vs INTEREST. Sentence 2: one 'must have' — near-certainty from evidence. Sentence 3: one 'should have' — the actionable change. Sentence 4: your BATNA at the time, honestly named — strong, weak or non-existent.

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Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: position or interest?

1. POSITION — a specific number on the table.
2. INTEREST — the reason behind their ask.
3. POSITION — a specific date.
4. INTEREST — continuity is what they really care about.

Reading: Position, interest, BATNA — the three things you need in the room

1. (B) The specific thing the other side says they want
2. (B) The reason behind the position — usually where the creative deal lives
3. (B) Near certainty about a past event, based on evidence
4. (B) Be calm, patient and specific in the room — and walk away credibly

Vocabulary: positions, interests, BATNA, and moves in the room

1. opening offer
2. BATNA
3. save-face concession
4. call(ed) their bluff
5. test the waters
6. reservation price / walk-away point

1. Don't take €40k as their final number — that's their opening offer.
2. Before you go in, know your BATNA.
3. Give them a save-face concession: let them win on payment terms while we win on price.
4. The March 31st deadline felt like theatre — I'd have called their bluff with a stronger fallback.
5. That's below our reservation price — we walk.

Grammar focus: Past modals (must have / might have / should have)

1. must have known
2. should have asked
3. might have been / may have been / could have been
4. can't have seen / couldn't have seen
5. shouldn't have offered
6. might have overridden / may have / could have

1. Model: 'The March 31st deadline might have been theatre — they never actually said what happened April 1st if we missed it.' (Speculation, not accusation — better in a written debrief.)
2. Model: 'We should have anchored higher — €50k, not €40k. Given how quickly they said yes, we must have been well below their reservation price.'
3. Model: 'She must have had another offer on the table — she didn't push back on any of our terms, which usually means she's already committed elsewhere.'
4. Model: 'Our BATNA was stronger than we treated it. We could have walked at the €35k mark — we still had the other pipeline. We shouldn't have felt as squeezed as we did.'

1. Model: 'Their POSITION was €40k; their INTEREST was almost certainly protecting their CFO's approved budget cap, not the value of the work. They must have already promised their boss a number under €45k — otherwise they'd have counter-offered at €42k, not held firm at €40k.'
2. Model: 'Their POSITION was Friday; their INTEREST was quarter-end revenue for their own team. They might have been bluffing on the 15% — end-of-quarter deadlines are often theatre — but they can't have been bluffing on wanting to close, or they wouldn't have given us the ultimatum in the first place.'
3. Model: 'Their POSITION was 'yes' at the number; their INTEREST was almost certainly title, team or a start date — not money. They should have negotiated — and the fact they didn't means we might have anchored the offer too low. We could have paid another 10% and still had the deal.'

Listening: three post-deal debriefs — same negotiation, three read-outs

1. Voice B (Marta). Uses past modals precisely ('they must have already agreed…', 'we should have anchored…'), separates position from interest ('the €260k number was theatre; the INTEREST was the CFO's

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

promise to the board'), and names our own BATNA failure ('we treated the deal as our only option — it wasn't').
2. Voice A (Ravi). 'They lied about the budget / they never intended to sign with us' — accusations, no past modals, no interest analysis. The client is the villain, so there's nothing WE could have done. Useless for the next deal.
3. Voice C (Kwame) — 'we probably should have done more, we could have been sharper, honestly it's on all of us'. Sounds humble, but names no specific mistake, no interest, no past modal used precisely. The debrief produces no lesson.
1. POSITION: '€260k or we go with the competitor.' INTEREST (per Marta): the CFO had promised the board a specific number under €270k, so the €260k wasn't about value — it was about the CFO not losing face in front of the board. Marta's evidence: the client never pushed back on scope, only on price, and they went silent for 48 hours after we offered €275k — 'she must have been re-briefing her CFO'.
2. 'They MUST HAVE ALREADY AGREED internally on the €260k number before our second call — otherwise the CFO wouldn't have gone silent for 48 hours. We SHOULD HAVE ASKED for their budget cap in the discovery call, not tried to guess it in the offer. And we COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN they were talking to the competitor — but we SHOULD HAVE ASSUMED they were.'
3. 'We treated this deal as our only option in Q4. It wasn't — we had three other late-stage deals. We negotiated like we had no BATNA, so they smelled it. The €260k floor should have been our walk-away point, not our concession point.' Ravi blames the client; Kwame is vague; only Marta names OUR strategic error.
1. Certainty and precision as separate things. 'They must have already agreed' = high certainty from evidence. 'We couldn't have known about the competitor' = accurate about what was and wasn't possible with the information at the time. 'We should have asked for their budget' = actionable regret. Ravi flattens all three into 'they lied' and Kwame flattens all three into 'we could have done more'. Neither produces a lesson.
2. It teaches the team the wrong lesson. If the client is always the villain, the team's mental model of losing becomes 'they were bad-faith' — not 'we misread the interest'. The team stops learning to read the room, because the room is 'unfair'. Two more quarters of this and the team can't diagnose losses at all.
3. Because a CRO can't act on it. 'We could have been sharper' — where? On price? On timing? On BATNA framing? Vague self-blame absorbs the guilt but produces no next-Monday change. Marta names the specific move ('anchor the discovery call around their budget cap'); Kwame names none. Vague humility is a form of avoiding the diagnosis.

Quiz

1. (B) Near certainty from evidence about the past
2. (B) Regret / actionable criticism about a past decision
3. (B) The specific ask on the table
4. (B) The reason behind the position — usually where creative deals live
5. (B) Your best alternative if this deal falls apart — the source of your walk-away power

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Negotiation lexis

1. opening offer
2. BATNA
3. save-face concession
4. call their bluff
5. test the waters
6. reservation price

Exercise 2 — Past modals

1. must have known
2. should have asked
3. might have been / may have / could have
4. can't have seen / couldn't have seen
5. shouldn't have offered
6. might have overridden / may have / could have

Exercise 3 — Position or interest?

1. (A) POSITION
2. (B) INTEREST
3. (A) POSITION
4. (B) INTEREST
5. (A) POSITION
6. (B) INTEREST

Exercise 4 — Debrief with past modals

1. Model: 'The March 31st deadline might have been theatre — they never said what would happen April 1st if we missed it.'
2. Model: 'We should have anchored higher — €50k, not €40k. They said yes so quickly, we must have been well below their reservation price.'
3. Model: 'She must have had another offer — she didn't push back on any of our terms, which usually means she's committed elsewhere.'
4. Model: 'Our BATNA was stronger than we treated it. We could have walked at €35k — we shouldn't have felt as squeezed as we did.'

Exercise 5 — Three post-deal debriefs

1. Voice B (Marta) — separates position from interest, uses past modals precisely, names OUR BATNA failure ('we treated this deal as our only option — it wasn't'), and gives ONE actionable change ('anchor the discovery call around their budget cap').
2. Voice A (Ravi) — 'they lied' — accusations, no past modals, no interest analysis. The client is the villain, so there's nothing WE could have done.
3. Voice C (Kwame) — 'we could have been sharper' — humble-sounding, but names no specific mistake, no interest, no past modal used precisely.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class