APEX ENGLISH
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B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 10 · B10B

The consulting mindset

Theme · AI-augmented. Consulting mindset.

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The consulting mindset

Theme: AI-augmented. Consulting mindset.

Learning objectives

- Frame a client problem the way a consultant does: hypothesis first, evidence second, recommendation on one page.
- Use ARTICLES (a / an / the / zero) with precision — the difference between 'a solution' and 'the solution' is the whole meeting.
- Use WORD-PAIR COLLOCATIONS ('pros and cons', 'short- and long-term', 'do's and don'ts', 'risks and rewards') to sound like a consultant, not a student.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Class Book

Warm-up · 'On one page'

Think of the LAST problem you presented at work — to a boss, a client, a team. In 45 seconds out loud, present the SAME problem in ONE page: (1) one sentence on WHAT the problem is, (2) one sentence on the HYPOTHESIS you have about it, (3) two options you'd consider, (4) which one you'd back and why. End with 'The one number I'd need to confirm this is…'.

Did you START with the problem, or with the solution you'd already chosen?

Is your hypothesis testable — or is it a preference disguised as an insight?

Do the two options genuinely differ, or is one a strawman to make the other look good?

Bonus: which of the two would your CFO actually let you fund?

Lead-in: a / an / the / zero — spot the mismatch

For each line from a consulting draft, decide whether the article use is PRECISE, VAGUE (should be more specific), or WRONG (grammatically off).

1. 1. 'We recommend A pilot with THE Berlin practice in Q3.'

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2. 2. 'The client asked for A solution.'

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3. 3. 'We should use AI to draft the memo.'

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4. 4. 'THE pilot should include all 400 consultants.'

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5. 5. 'We propose A new pricing model AND the current one for control.'

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6. 6. 'Client wants ROI.'

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followUp: Which of these six lines have YOU written in a slide in the last quarter — and which article was carrying more weight than it deserved?

PRECISE

VAGUE (should be more specific)

WRONG (grammatically off)

Reading: 'The one-page brief'

The consulting industry has, for about seventy years, sold the same product under different names. Whether it's called strategy, transformation, digital, or — this decade — AI, the underlying craft is

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unchanged: help a busy executive make a defensible decision on one page. The tools evolve. The one-page brief does not. A junior consultant who cannot compress a 200-slide deck into a page that a Chief Executive can read on a plane is a junior consultant who will not become a senior one.

The one-page brief has a shape. At the top, in one sentence, is the QUESTION the client is really asking — often not the question the client first asked. Below it, in one paragraph, is the HYPOTHESIS: what you believe the answer is, before the analysis, so the reader knows whether you and they have converged or diverged. Then two, at most three, OPTIONS — genuinely different, with the pros and cons, the short- and long-term implications, the risks and rewards. Then the RECOMMENDATION: one of the options, in one line, with the number that would change your mind. And, at the bottom, the DO'S AND DON'TS — the operational move the client makes on Monday, and the trap they will fall into if they aren't warned.

Every junior gets the shape wrong in the same three ways. The first is starting with the analysis — five paragraphs on 'how we approached the problem' before the reader has been told what the problem is. The client's time was spent long before the recommendation appears. The second is offering three options that don't genuinely differ — 'expand', 'expand carefully', 'expand very carefully'. Real options force a real trade-off; if two of them collapse into 'do the same thing at different speeds', you have one option and two decorations. The third is a recommendation without a kill-metric. A recommendation the recommender would never revisit is not a recommendation — it's an opinion.

The pros and cons of the one-page brief are worth naming honestly. The PRO is brutal: it forces the consultant to have actually thought. The CON, less discussed, is that it strips the presenter of the plausible deniability a long deck provides. On a slide-heavy deck, when the recommendation fails, the consultant can point at slide 137 and say 'we did flag that'. On a one-page brief, the recommendation is one sentence, over your signature, and the risks and rewards are the ones you wrote down. That is the point. A consulting mindset is, in the end, less about frameworks than about the willingness to be caught.

1. The 'craft' the consulting industry has sold for seventy years is…
   - (A) Frameworks and tools
   - (B) Helping a busy executive make a defensible decision on one page
   - (C) Long slide decks
2. The top line of a one-page brief is…
   - (A) The consultant's biography
   - (B) The question the client is really asking — often not the one they first asked
   - (C) A summary of methodology
3. The three common junior mistakes are…
   - (A) Wrong font, wrong colour, wrong logo
   - (B) Starting with the analysis; three options that don't really differ; a recommendation with no kill-metric
   - (C) Not enough slides

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

4. The 'risks and rewards' section forces the consultant to…
    (A) Hedge everything
    (B) Write down what they'd defend and what would embarrass them if it went wrong
    (C) Blame the client
5. The consulting mindset is less about frameworks than about…
    (A) Selling the next engagement
    (B) The willingness to be caught — one signed sentence, no plausible deniability
    (C) Charging by the hour

Vocabulary in context

Match each consulting term to its plain-English meaning.

hypothesis-first — state what you believe the answer is BEFORE you present the analysis

kill-metric — the number that would make you abandon or reverse the recommendation

one-page brief — the compressed decision document — one page, one signature

framing question — the real question the client is asking, restated cleanly at the top

plausible deniability — the room a long deck gives you to say 'we did flag that on slide 137'

trade-off — the honest acknowledgement that choosing option A costs you something in option B

Vocabulary: the consulting mindset — frames, word-pairs, moves

hypothesis / working hypothesis — what you posit the answer to be, ahead of the full analysis

the framing question — the real question, restated at the top of the page

the recommendation — the one sentence you'd sign your name to

kill-metric / the number that would change your mind — when to abandon the plan

the trade-off — what you lose by choosing this option

the executive summary — the whole document in five lines

pros and cons — arguments in favour and against — invariably paired, always plural

short- and long-term (implications) — the compressed vs. the expanded timeline

risks and rewards — downside and upside — always together

do's and don'ts — the operational rules — what to do, what to avoid

carrot and stick — reward and consequence — the two levers

supply and demand — the two sides of the market — never one without the other

steer / steering — the executive check-in — steering, not minutiae

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

the ask — the specific thing you want the client to do next

the deliverable — the artefact you owe by the deadline

scope creep — the slow expansion of the engagement without extra fee

boil the ocean (v.) — try to analyse everything — the junior's classic trap

the elephant in the room — the obvious problem no one is naming

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase from the sets above.

1. Before we go into the analysis, our ___ is that the pricing problem is really a segmentation problem.

---

2. Two paths open to the board — let me walk you through the ___ ___ ___ of each.

---

3. This engagement started as a pricing review. Six weeks in, we're doing everything. Classic ___ ___.

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4. The ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ is that the CFO doesn't believe the numbers — nobody wants to say it.

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5. We need to be clear on the ___ — what specifically we want the client to sign off on Friday.

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6. We can't ___ ___ ___ ___ in six weeks — let's scope this to the three markets that matter.

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. We need to identify the <u>real question the client is asking</u> at the top of the memo.

---

2. Every proposal must include <u>the number that would make us stop the project</u>.

---

3. Choosing this path involves a <u>sacrifice of speed for higher security</u>.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

4. We must avoid <u>the slow expansion of the project</u> beyond the agreed fee.

5. Don't <u>try to analyse every single detail</u>; just focus on the three core markets.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a one-page brief for a client CEO recommending a strategy for their market expansion, following the consulting mindset.

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: The framing question for this engagement is whether to prioritize rapid market share in Brazil or to focus on high-margin stability in the EU. Our working hypothesis is that the short-term rewards of the Brazilian market outweigh the regulatory risks, provided we have a clear exit strategy. We have identified two genuine options: a full-scale subsidiary launch or a lighter-touch joint venture with a local partner. Each involves a significant trade-off; the subsidiary offers total control but carries much higher capital risk. We recommend the joint venture as the optimal first move. To ensure accountability, we have set a kill-metric of 5% market penetration by month 18; if we fail to hit this, we will pivot back to the EU. We must avoid boiling the ocean with further analysis and instead focus on securing the partner by Q3. Recommendation: sign the partnership LOI by Friday to lock in the exclusivity window.

Practice B — Consultant collocations

Match each verb / phrase to the noun it most naturally goes with.

- **frame** — the problem before you propose the solution
- **test** — the hypothesis with two data points, not ten
- **name** — the trade-off honestly, not just the upside
- **sign** — the recommendation with your own name
- **publish** — the kill-metric alongside the recommendation
- **avoid** — boiling the ocean when the deadline is Friday

Practice C — Build a consulting sentence

Use each cluster of words + a word-pair collocation to write ONE sentence for a one-page brief.

1. expand into Brazil · risks and rewards · one paragraph

2. pilot the copilot · pros and cons · one line each

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

3. restructure sales · short- and long-term · trade-off

4. AI policy · do's and don'ts · one page

Practice D — Odd one out

Which term in each group does NOT belong to the same family?

1. hypothesis · framing question · recommendation · scope creep

2. pros and cons · risks and rewards · short- and long-term · boil the ocean

3. the ask · the deliverable · the steer · the elephant in the room

4. kill-metric · trade-off · executive summary · plausible deniability

Grammar focus: articles (a / an / the / zero) in a consulting register

1. A / AN — first mention, one of several — A + consonant sound: 'a pilot', 'a recommendation', 'a hypothesis'. AN + vowel sound: 'an option', 'an executive', 'an AI tool' (sounds: 'ay-eye'). Meaning: ONE of a possible set, or FIRST mention. • 'We recommend A PILOT with the Berlin practice.' (one of several possible pilots — this one)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

2. THE — the reader knows which one — THE = definite: the specific one both writer and reader can identify. • 'THE CLIENT asked for a decision by Friday.' (this specific client — we're all in the room) • 'THE Berlin practice.' (there's only one) • 'THE recommendation.' (the one we're about to sign) Rule: use THE when the noun has already been introduced, OR when there's only one possible referent.

3. ZERO article — plurals in general, uncountables, category words — Zero article = the noun as a CATEGORY, not a specific instance. • 'AI is transforming consulting.' (category, not 'an AI', not 'the AI') • 'CONSULTANTS bill by the hour.' (plural, general) • 'RISK, TRUST, GOVERNANCE — the three we track.' (uncountable, category) ✗ 'The AI is transforming' — this refers to ONE specific AI, which is not what you mean. ✗ 'The consultants bill by the hour' (general claim) — 'consultants' generally, no article.

4. A vs. THE — the meeting-changing distinction — 'The client asked for A solution.' = the client wants some solution, unspecified. VAGUE. 'The client asked for THE solution.' = the client expects THE (already-agreed) solution. LOADED. 'The client asked for A pricing recommendation by Friday.' = one specific ask, precise. Rule: if the reader cannot identify WHICH one from context, you probably want 'a'. If they can, you want 'the'. If neither, you probably want zero article and a plural.

5. Common traps in a consulting register — • 'We recommend the pilot with Berlin.' → only correct if the pilot was ALREADY named. First mention should be 'a pilot with Berlin'. • 'AI is a tool' ✓ / 'The AI is a tool' ✗ (as a general category) • 'The advice' ✓ (specific, mentioned) / 'An advice' ✗ ('advice' is UNCOUNTABLE — 'a piece of advice') • 'Informations', 'feedbacks', 'researches' ✗ — all uncountable in English. Zero article and singular verb. • Titles: 'THE Managing Partner signed off' ✓ (there is only one). 'MANAGING PARTNER Anika Rao signed off' ✓ (zero article before a role used as a title in apposition).

Exercise A — Complete with a / an / the / — (zero)

Complete each line from a real consulting brief. — means 'no article'.

1. We recommend ___ pilot with ___ Berlin practice in Q3.

2. ___ AI is not ___ substitute for ___ judgement.

3. ___ client asked for ___ pricing recommendation by Friday.

4. ___ Managing Partner signed off ___ rollout, but ___ risk team asked for ___ 30-day review.

5. ___ hallucinations are ___ classic failure mode of ___ large-language models.

Exercise B — Fix the article

Each line has ONE article error. Correct it.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

1. 'We proposed the pilot with a Berlin practice.'
2. 'An advice from the risk team was clear: don't ship.'
3. 'AI has been a wonderful tool for a drafting.'
4. 'The Managing Partner Anika Rao signed off.'
5. 'Client wants ROI on SAP investment within 18 months.'

Exercise C — Rewrite the sentence with the right word-pair collocation

Rewrite each vague sentence using ONE of: pros and cons · risks and rewards · short- and long-term · do's and don'ts · supply and demand · carrot and stick.

1. 'There are good things and bad things about the plan.'
2. 'It's risky but there's a big upside if it works.'
3. 'This will hurt for a bit but pay off later.'
4. 'Here are the things to do and not do.'
5. 'There aren't enough of the specialists everyone wants.'

Listening: three juniors present the same problem

You're the Partner. Three junior consultants have 90 seconds each to brief you on the SAME client problem: a European retail chain deciding whether to open 40 new stores in FY27. You're listening for: (1) who FRAMES before they solve, (2) whose options genuinely differ, (3) who names a kill-metric, (4) who uses articles / word-pairs like a consultant, not a student.

pre

What is the ONE sentence you'd want at the top of the brief before you hear anything else?

What kill-metric would YOU set on '40 new stores in FY27'?

gist

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

1. Which junior's brief will you take to the client?

2. Which junior boiled the ocean?

3. Which junior has a clean instinct but no discipline?

detail

1. What EXACTLY is Sara's framing question, and why is it different from the client's first ask?

2. What is Sara's kill-metric, and why does it work?

Third listen — the article / word-pair tell

Focus on how each junior handles articles and word-pairs. Small choices show whether they've been coached — and whether they think in wholes.

1. Sara says 'THE client', 'A pilot with four regions', 'THE trade-off is…'. What does that show?

2. Tomás says 'AN advice', 'THE pilot' (first mention), 'informations from the survey'. What does that show?

3. Meera reaches for zero word-pair collocations. What is the risk?

Language from the audio — consulting-register moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES for the speaker.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

"The client asked how to open 40 stores. The framing question is where to spend the FY27 budget to preserve long-term optionality." — restates the ask — signals the consultant has THOUGHT, not just executed

"Two options: 40 stores in one region, or 10 stores in four. The trade-off is revenue versus optionality." — genuinely different options + explicit trade-off = a real choice, not a strawman

"A like-for-like decline of more than 4% in H1 kills the further 30 stores in H2 — that decision reverts to the board." — kill-metric that is numerical, time-bound and has a named consequence

"The pros and cons sit on one page; the short- and long-term implications sit next to each option." — word-pair collocations that STRUCTURE the brief; the reader knows what shape to expect

"An advice from the client, informations from the survey…" — uncountable-noun errors — the L1-transfer tell that a senior hasn't yet edited this junior

"In most cases we should probably consider a pilot of some kind, kind of." — hedged, unsigned, no hypothesis, no metric — the brief that gets rewritten at 22:00 on Sunday

Voice A (Tomás): So, our methodology. We looked at the European retail sector, we surveyed 200 stores, we did a competitive benchmark. An advice from the client suggested they want to open 40 new stores. Informations from the survey are that the market is competitive. Three options: expand aggressively, expand carefully, expand very carefully. We recommend the pilot. We think it will work well.

Voice B (Sara): OK — the client asked how to open 40 stores in FY27. The framing question, though, is different: across which geographies should we spend the FY27 store-opening budget to maximise long-term revenue and preserve optionality? Our working hypothesis is that concentrated expansion into one region maximises year-one revenue but destroys optionality if that region softens; a seeded pilot across four regions costs us 15% of year-one revenue but keeps three future options open. Two genuinely different options — the pros and cons and the short- and long-term implications sit on page two. The recommendation is the seeded pilot. Kill-metric: a like-for-like sales decline of more than 4% in the first two regions in H1 FY27 kills the further 30 stores planned for H2, and that decision reverts to the board. The risks and rewards are named on the front page, over my signature.

Voice C (Meera): Yeah, so the client kind of wants to expand, and there are a few different ways they could do it. In most cases we should probably consider a pilot of some kind. There are pros and cons, obviously. I think we should probably recommend, you know, being careful. It's a big decision. We should discuss it more with the team.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second one-page brief, out loud

Solo task. Pick a real decision facing your team, department or client. Deliver the ONE-PAGE BRIEF out loud in 90 seconds. Record yourself. You MUST include: (1) the FRAMING QUESTION restated in one sentence (not the question that was first asked); (2) a testable HYPOTHESIS; (3) TWO genuinely different OPTIONS with the TRADE-OFF named; (4) the RECOMMENDATION over your signature; (5) the KILL-METRIC (numerical, time-bound, with a consequence); (6) at least ONE word-pair collocation ('pros and cons', 'short- and long-term', 'risks and rewards', 'do's and don'ts').

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Scene: A real current decision at work (recommended)

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: your partner / director, 90 seconds, no slides.

Scene: A friend / family member's business decision

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: them, treated as a client with a budget.

Scene: A public-domain decision (a local charity, a school board)

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: the chair of the board.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'framing question + kill-metric'

Compress your brief to TWO sentences: (1) the framing question restated, (2) the kill-metric with its consequence. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'The real question is ___. If ___ by ___, we ___.'

Writing mini-task

Write the ONE-PAGE BRIEF for a real decision (max 180 words). It must contain, in order: (1) framing question, (2) hypothesis, (3) two options with pros and cons, (4) trade-off in one sentence, (5) recommendation over your signature, (6) kill-metric with a consequence, (7) do's and don'ts (three of each, one line each). Every article ('a', 'the', zero) must be intentional. At least TWO word-pair collocations from Unit 10B.

Wrap-up

One RESTATED framing question you'll use with your team this week — different from the one the client first asked.

One 'a / the / zero' error you know you make and will actively watch for in your next draft.

One WORD-PAIR ('pros and cons', 'short- and long-term', 'risks and rewards', 'do's and don'ts') you'll USE in your next email — and MEAN.

Quiz

1. The correct article use is…
   (A) 'We recommend the pilot with a Berlin practice.'
   (B) 'We recommend a pilot with the Berlin practice.'
   (C) 'We recommend a pilot with a Berlin practice.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

2. Which noun is UNCOUNTABLE and takes NO 'a/an'?
   (A) decision
   (B) advice
   (C) recommendation
3. A well-formed kill-metric is…
   (A) 'We'll revisit if things go wrong.'
   (B) 'A like-for-like sales decline of more than 4% in H1 kills the 30 further stores in H2 — that decision reverts to the board.'
   (C) 'We recommend caution.'
4. The correct sentence uses AI as a category…
   (A) 'The AI is transforming consulting.'
   (B) 'AI is transforming consulting.'
   (C) 'An AI is transforming consulting.'
5. The word-pair collocation is…
   (A) 'The advantages and things.'
   (B) 'Pros and cons.'
   (C) 'The plus side and the negative aspect.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Workbook — home practice

Exercise 1 — Consulting-mindset vocabulary

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase from the box.

Word bank: framing question · hypothesis · trade-off · kill-metric · scope creep · elephant in the room · boil the ocean

1. Before we open the analysis, our working ___ is that the pricing problem is really a segmentation problem.

2. The client asked how to open 40 stores. The ___ ___ is where to spend the FY27 budget to preserve optionality.

3. The ___-___ is stark: one bad quarter of margin sacrificed for two years of predictable growth.

4. Every recommendation must publish a ___-___ — the number that would make us reverse it.

5. This started as a pricing review. Six weeks in, we're doing everything — a textbook case of ___ ___.

6. The ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ is that the CFO doesn't believe the survey numbers.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

7. We have six weeks — we can't ___ ___ ___ ___. Let's scope this to the three markets that matter.

Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a strategic brief (120–180 words) for a client engagement regarding a major business decision. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: framing question, hypothesis, trade-off, kill-metric, scope creep, elephant in the room, or boil the ocean.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, consulting-style register.

Use articles (a, an, the) intentionally and correctly.

Structure clearly: Framing, Hypothesis, Recommendation, Risk Management.

model: Subject: Strategic Framework for Retail Expansion To the Client Engagement Team, Regarding the retail expansion project, we must avoid the temptation to boil the ocean by analysing every possible variable. Instead, we should focus on the framing question: how can we test the market's appetite for our premium line without overcommitting capital? Our working hypothesis is that a targeted digital-first launch will provide better data than a broad physical rollout. We must address the elephant in the room—namely, that our current supply chain cannot support the original store target. The core trade-off we face is between rapid market share gains and operational stability. To manage scope creep, we have defined a strict kill-metric: if the customer acquisition cost in the pilot phase exceeds €45, we will pause the expansion. This approach ensures we remain data-driven and agile, protecting our margins while we gather the necessary intelligence to scale.

Exercise 2 — Articles (a / an / the / — zero)

Complete each line from a real consulting brief. Use '—' for zero article.

1. 'We recommend ___ pilot with ___ Berlin practice in Q3.'

2. '___ AI is not ___ substitute for ___ judgement.'

3. '___ client asked for ___ pricing recommendation by Friday.'

4. '___ Managing Partner signed off ___ rollout, but ___ risk team asked for ___ 30-day review.'

5. '___ hallucinations are ___ classic failure mode of ___ large-language models.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise 3 — Fix the article error

Correct the ONE article error in each sentence.

1. 'We proposed the pilot with a Berlin practice.'

2. 'An advice from the risk team was clear: don't ship.'

3. 'AI has been a wonderful tool for a drafting.'

4. 'The Managing Partner Anika Rao signed off.'

5. 'Client wants ROI on SAP investment within 18 months.'

Exercise 4 — Framed or unframed?

Decide whether each opening sentence FRAMES the problem (hypothesis first, real question) or is UNFRAMED (methodology first, unrestated ask).

1. 'The client asked how to open 40 stores. The real question is where to spend the FY27 budget to preserve optionality.'

   (A) FRAMED

   (B) UNFRAMED

2. 'We surveyed 200 stores and did a competitive benchmark. Three options: expand aggressively, expand carefully, expand very carefully.'

   (A) FRAMED

   (B) UNFRAMED

3. 'Our working hypothesis: concentrated expansion maximises year-one revenue but destroys optionality if that region softens.'

   (A) FRAMED

   (B) UNFRAMED

4. 'The client kind of wants to expand — there are pros and cons.'

   (A) FRAMED

   (B) UNFRAMED

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

5. 'Two genuinely different options: 40 stores in one region OR 10 stores in four. The trade-off is revenue vs. optionality.'
   (A) FRAMED
   (B) UNFRAMED
6. 'In most cases we should probably consider a pilot of some kind.'
   (A) FRAMED
   (B) UNFRAMED

Exercise 5 — Rewrite with a word-pair collocation

Rewrite each vague sentence using ONE of: pros and cons · risks and rewards · short- and long-term · do's and don'ts · supply and demand · carrot and stick.

1. 'There are good things and bad things about the plan.'
2. 'It's risky but there's a big upside if it works.'
3. 'This will hurt for a bit but pay off later.'
4. 'Here are the things to do and not do.'
5. 'There aren't enough of the specialists everyone wants.'

Exercise 6 — Three juniors present the same problem

You'll hear three junior consultants brief the same client problem: whether to open 40 new stores in FY27. Decide whose brief goes to the client.

1. Whose brief will you take to the client, and why?
2. Whose brief 'boiled the ocean'?
3. Whose brief has instinct but no discipline?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Voice A (Tomás): So, our methodology. We looked at the European retail sector, we surveyed 200 stores, we did a competitive benchmark. An advice from the client suggested they want to open 40 new stores. Informations from the survey are that the market is competitive. Three options: expand aggressively, expand carefully, expand very carefully. We recommend the pilot. We think it will work well.

Voice B (Sara): The client asked how to open 40 stores in FY27. The framing question is different: across which geographies should we spend the FY27 budget to maximise long-term revenue and preserve optionality? Working hypothesis: concentrated expansion into one region maximises year-one revenue but destroys optionality if the region softens; a seeded pilot across four regions costs 15% of year-one revenue but keeps three future options open. Two genuinely different options, with the pros and cons and the short- and long-term implications on page two. Recommendation: the seeded pilot. Kill-metric: a like-for-like sales decline of more than 4% in the first two regions in H1 FY27 kills the further 30 stores in H2 — that decision reverts to the board. Risks and rewards are named on the front page, over my signature.

Voice C (Meera): Yeah, so the client kind of wants to expand, and there are a few different ways they could do it. In most cases we should probably consider a pilot of some kind. There are pros and cons, obviously. I think we should probably recommend being careful. It's a big decision. We should discuss it more with the team.

Exercise 7 — Your one-page brief

Write your OWN one-page brief for a real decision (max 180 words). Order: (1) framing question, (2) hypothesis, (3) two options with pros and cons, (4) trade-off in one sentence, (5) recommendation over your signature, (6) kill-metric with a consequence, (7) do's and don'ts (three each). Every article must be intentional. At least TWO word-pair collocations.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: a / an / the / zero — spot the mismatch

1. → PRECISE. 'A pilot' = one of several possible pilots (correct — this is the option being proposed). 'THE Berlin practice' = a specific one both sides can identify.
2. → VAGUE. Any client asks for 'A' solution — the sentence is empty unless you say WHICH solution the client wants. Downgrade to a concrete noun phrase: 'The client asked for a pricing recommendation by Friday.'
3. → PRECISE. 'AI' = zero article, uncountable (the category, not an instance). 'THE memo' = the specific memo already under discussion.
4. → WRONG in strategy — a pilot BY DEFINITION is a subset. If it includes all 400, it isn't a pilot; it's a rollout. Either 'A pilot with a subset…' or 'The rollout to all 400…'.
5. → PRECISE. 'A new pricing model' = one of several possible new ones (this specific proposal). 'THE current one' = the single existing model both sides know.
6. → VAGUE (and slightly wrong). 'ROI' is fine as zero article (uncountable), BUT the sentence is meaningless without WHICH investment and OVER WHAT HORIZON. Consulting rewrite: 'The client wants a defensible ROI on the SAP investment within 18 months.'

Reading: 'The one-page brief'

1. (B) Helping a busy executive make a defensible decision on one page
2. (B) The question the client is really asking — often not the one they first asked
3. (B) Starting with the analysis; three options that don't really differ; a recommendation with no kill-metric
4. (B) Write down what they'd defend and what would embarrass them if it went wrong
5. (B) The willingness to be caught — one signed sentence, no plausible deniability

Vocabulary: the consulting mindset — frames, word-pairs, moves

1. hypothesis
2. pros and cons
3. scope creep
4. elephant in the room
5. ask
6. boil the ocean

1. We need to identify the framing question at the top of the memo.
2. Every proposal must include a kill-metric.
3. Choosing this path involves a trade-off between speed and security.
4. We must avoid scope creep beyond the agreed fee.
5. Don't boil the ocean; just focus on the three core markets.

1. Expanding into Brazil in FY26 offers a first-mover reward in health-tech and a currency-and-regulatory risk equal in magnitude — the risks and rewards are, honestly, of the same order.
2. Pros: 41% drafting uplift, junior morale, faster client turnaround. Cons: one client-facing error already, and adoption is not discernment. Recommendation on the next page.
3. Restructuring the sales team hits short-term revenue for one quarter in exchange for a long-term rebuild of the pipeline — the trade-off is one bad quarter for two years of predictable growth.
4. The AI policy fits on one page: the do's (name the reviewer, log the sign-off, publish the corrections) and the don'ts (no PII, no unreviewed client output, no 'everyone learned from it' as an explanation) sit side by side.

1. scope creep — the other three are STAGES of a one-page brief; scope creep is a project-management pathology.
2. boil the ocean — the other three are word-pair collocations that structure a brief; boil the ocean is a warning about analysis.
3. the elephant in the room — the other three are things you OWE the client; the elephant is a thing you must NAME.
4. plausible deniability — the other three are things a good brief HAS; plausible deniability is what a good brief REMOVES.

Grammar focus: articles (a / an / the / zero) in a consulting register

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

1. 'We recommend A pilot with THE Berlin practice in Q3.' (first mention of the pilot → a; only one Berlin practice → the.)
2. '— AI is not A substitute for — JUDGEMENT.' (AI as category → zero; a specific substitute → a; judgement uncountable → zero.)
3. 'THE client asked for A pricing recommendation by Friday.' (the client is known; this is one specific pricing recommendation.)
4. 'THE Managing Partner signed off THE rollout, but THE risk team asked for A 30-day review.' (unique roles/objects → the; first mention of the review → a.)
5. '— HALLUCINATIONS are THE classic failure mode of — LARGE-LANGUAGE MODELS.' (plural general → zero; the one specific classic failure mode → the; general category → zero.)
1. 'We proposed A pilot with THE Berlin practice.' (First-mention pilot → a; specific unique Berlin practice → the.)
2. 'THE advice from the risk team was clear' — 'advice' is UNCOUNTABLE, no 'a/an'. If you must count, 'a PIECE of advice'.
3. 'AI has been a wonderful tool for — DRAFTING.' ('Drafting' is a general gerund/activity → zero article.)
4. '— MANAGING PARTNER Anika Rao signed off.' (Role used as a title in apposition to a name → zero article.)
5. 'THE client wants A defensible ROI on THE SAP investment within 18 months.' (Specific known client → the; unspecified but singular ROI target → a; specific known investment → the.)
1. 'The plan has clear PROS AND CONS — we've listed them side by side on page two.'
2. 'The RISKS AND REWARDS are of the same order — the memo names both, not just the upside.'
3. 'SHORT- AND LONG-TERM effects diverge: one bad quarter of margin, two years of predictable growth.'
4. 'The one-page policy is a list of DO'S AND DON'TS — five each, one page, signed.'
5. 'This is a classic SUPPLY-AND-DEMAND problem — we've under-hired the profile the whole market is chasing.'

Listening: three juniors present the same problem

1. Voice B (Sara). Opens with the framing question in one line, states a testable hypothesis, offers two genuinely different options (expand 40 stores in one region OR seed 10 stores in four regions), names the trade-off (revenue vs. optionality), names the kill-metric (a like-for-like sales decline of >4% in the first two regions in H1). Uses 'the client', 'a pilot', 'the trade-off' correctly and reaches for 'short- and long-term' and 'risks and rewards' as word-pairs.
2. Voice A (Tomás). Five paragraphs of methodology and market context before you hear what the problem is. Options are 'expand aggressively / expand carefully / expand very carefully' — one option in three disguises. No kill-metric. Uses 'A client' and 'AN advice' — first sign of an under-thought register.
3. Voice C (Meera). Sees the real trade-off (concentration vs. spread), but never states a hypothesis, never signs a recommendation, and hedges every sentence ('kind of', 'in most cases', 'we should probably'). Six weeks from now, her brief will be the one the partner rewrites at 22:00 on a Sunday.
1. The client's first ask was 'how do we open 40 new stores in FY27?'. Sara's framing question is 'across which geographies should we spend the FY27 store-opening budget to maximise long-term revenue and preserve optionality?' The client's question assumed the geography and asked about the logistics. Sara's question puts the geography back on the table — which is where the money is actually decided.
2. 'A like-for-like sales decline of more than 4% in the first two regions in H1 FY27 kills the further 30 stores planned for H2 — those decisions revert to the board.' It works because it is (a) NUMERICAL, (b) TIME-BOUND, and (c) has a NAMED CONSEQUENCE. A kill-metric without a consequence is a chart caption.
1. She knows which nouns are specific ('the client', 'the trade-off' — one, known) and which are one of several ('a pilot' — the specific one she's proposing, first mention). She never says 'AN advice' — advice is uncountable and she knows it. It's a small tell that she's been coached to write, and rewritten.
2. Three uncountable-noun errors in one paragraph ('an advice', 'informations', likely 'feedbacks' next). It shows he's mapping his L1 grammar onto English and no senior has flagged it. Article + uncountable errors are the fastest way to read 'not yet client-ready' — even before the reader engages with the argument.
3. Without 'pros and cons', 'short- and long-term', 'risks and rewards', 'do's and don'ts', her brief reads like an undergraduate essay — hedged, discursive, unstructured. Word-pairs are the load-bearing beams of consulting prose: they signal you've considered BOTH sides and organised them. Their absence signals the opposite.

Quiz

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

1. (B) 'We recommend a pilot with the Berlin practice.'
2. (B) advice
3. (B) 'A like-for-like sales decline of more than 4% in H1 kills the 30 further stores in H2 — that decision reverts to the board.'
4. (B) 'AI is transforming consulting.'
5. (B) 'Pros and cons.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Consulting-mindset vocabulary

1. hypothesis
2. framing question
3. trade-off
4. kill-metric
5. scope creep
6. elephant in the room
7. boil the ocean

Exercise 2 — Articles (a / an / the / — zero)

1. 'We recommend A pilot with THE Berlin practice in Q3.'
2. '— AI is not A substitute for — judgement.'
3. 'THE client asked for A pricing recommendation by Friday.'
4. 'THE Managing Partner signed off THE rollout, but THE risk team asked for A 30-day review.'
5. '— Hallucinations are THE classic failure mode of — large-language models.'

Exercise 3 — Fix the article error

1. 'We proposed A pilot with THE Berlin practice.'
2. 'THE advice from the risk team was clear' — 'advice' is uncountable; no 'a/an'.
3. 'AI has been a wonderful tool for — drafting.'
4. '— Managing Partner Anika Rao signed off.' (Role + name in apposition → zero article.)
5. 'THE client wants A defensible ROI on THE SAP investment within 18 months.'

Exercise 4 — Framed or unframed?

1. (A) FRAMED
2. (B) UNFRAMED
3. (A) FRAMED
4. (B) UNFRAMED
5. (A) FRAMED
6. (B) UNFRAMED

Exercise 5 — Rewrite with a word-pair collocation

1. 'The plan has clear PROS AND CONS — we've listed them side by side on page two.'
2. 'The RISKS AND REWARDS are of the same order — the memo names both, not just the upside.'
3. 'SHORT- AND LONG-TERM effects diverge: one bad quarter of margin, two years of predictable growth.'
4. 'The one-page policy is a list of DO's AND DON'TS — five each, one page, signed.'
5. 'This is a classic SUPPLY-AND-DEMAND problem — we've under-hired the profile the whole market is chasing.'

Exercise 6 — Three juniors present the same problem

1. Voice B (Sara). Restates the framing question, states a testable hypothesis, offers two genuinely different options, names the trade-off, names a numerical + time-bound + consequence-linked kill-metric. Uses articles and word-pairs like a consultant.
2. Voice A (Tomás). Five sentences of methodology before you hear the problem; options that don't really differ ('expand aggressively / carefully / very carefully'); no kill-metric; 'an advice' and 'informations' — uncountable-noun errors that read 'not yet client-ready'.
3. Voice C (Meera). No hypothesis, no signed recommendation, hedged every sentence ('kind of', 'in most cases', 'we should probably'). Reaches for zero word-pair collocations.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class