



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 9 · B9A

Distributed teams

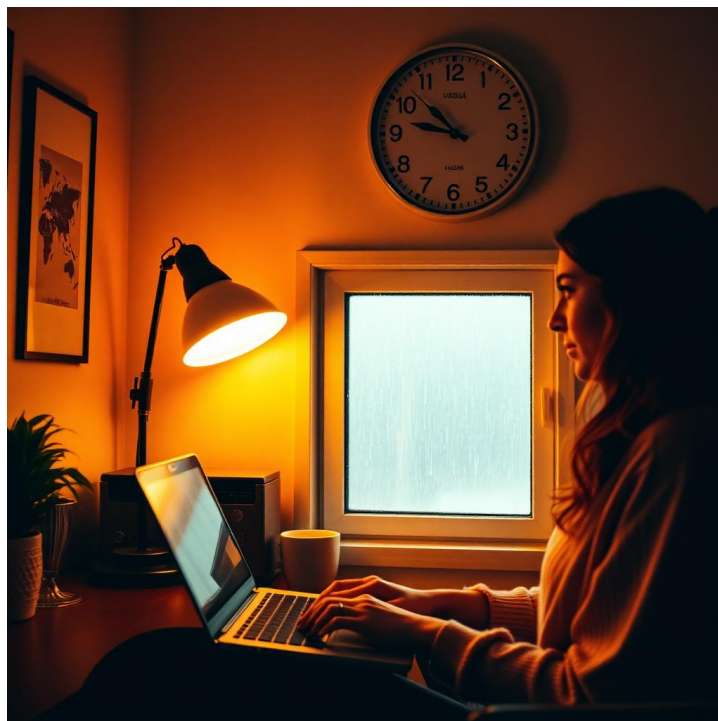
Theme · Remote & Global



Unit 9 · B9A

Distributed teams

Theme: Remote & Global



Learning objectives

- Describe how a distributed team actually works — async rituals, handoffs, time-zone hygiene.
- Use CLAUSES OF CONTRAST (although, even though, despite, whereas, however) to compare working styles across sites.
- Use CLAUSES OF PURPOSE (so that, in order to, to, in case) to explain WHY a ritual exists — not just what it is.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Your worst-ever remote setup

Think of the **WORST** remote or hybrid arrangement you've ever been part of — a job, a client project, a study group. In 45 seconds out loud: where were people, what was the time gap, and what specifically **DIDN'T** work? Then record a 30-second voice note ending with 'The one thing I'd change is...'.
How many time zones were involved — and were there ANY overlapping hours?
Was there ONE shared source of truth, or five half-updated docs?
Did decisions live in a meeting, in Slack, or nowhere at all?
Bonus: was there a 'default city' whose hours everyone else had to bend around?

Lead-in: async-first or meeting-heavy?

Match each team habit (1–6) to the label that fits it best. Only ONE label per item.

1. 1. Every project has a written doc. Meetings only happen if the doc has open questions no one can answer.

2. 2. Daily 09:00 standup for everyone — even the two engineers who are asleep at 09:00 GMT.

3. 3. Every decision gets a one-paragraph write-up in a shared thread within 24h, tagged with the owner.

4. 4. One 'overlap window' of 3 hours a day where synchronous conversation is allowed — everything else is written.

5. 5. If something isn't in a meeting, it doesn't happen. Docs are for after the fact.

6. 6. Weekly 'async town hall' — a 5-minute Loom + a written thread. Anyone can leave a comment in the next 48h.

followUp: Now — which one is YOUR team, honestly? And which one do you WISH it were?

ASYNC-FIRST

MEETING-HEAVY (timezone-blind)

DECISION LOG

OVERLAP-WINDOW

MEETING-HEAVY (meetings ARE the work)

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ASYNC RITUAL

Reading: The async-first team

Every distributed team eventually discovers the same brutal maths. If your team spans eight time zones, and you insist on 'a quick sync' as the default way to decide things, you have exactly two options: either the same three time zones win every argument, or somebody's meeting is at 03:00. Async-first teams don't discover this maths — they design around it from day one. The rule is embarrassingly simple: writing is the default, and meetings are the exception you have to justify.

In practice, this changes almost everything. A proposal doesn't get discussed in a meeting; it gets written up, in one page, with the owner named at the top and the decision needed made explicit. Colleagues in São Paulo and Singapore comment on the doc in their own working hours. If, after 48 hours, an open question remains that only a live conversation can resolve, THEN a 25-minute meeting is scheduled — with an agenda, in an overlap window, and with the written decision captured in the same doc afterwards. The meeting exists to serve the doc, not the other way round.

The cultural shift is harder than the process one. Async-first teams have to teach their most extraverted members that a fast reply is not the same as a good one — and their most anxious members that silence in a thread is not disapproval, but bedtime in Buenos Aires. In spite of the initial discomfort, most people, given the choice, don't want to go back. Deep work returns. Junior engineers stop being interrupted every seventeen minutes. Decisions stop evaporating between the meeting and the notes that were never written.

The trap, however, is real. A badly-implemented async culture becomes a documentation swamp — twelve half-updated pages, three contradictory decisions, and nobody sure which one is authoritative. The good async teams solve this with one non-negotiable ritual: a weekly 'decision log' that captures every meaningful call, its owner, its date, and a link to the doc. Whereas a chat message is ephemeral, a logged decision is searchable. It's the difference between a team that scales across time zones and a team that just... drifts.

1. The 'brutal maths' of the distributed team is...
 - (A) More people = slower decisions
 - (B) Insisting on 'a quick sync' means either the same time zones always win, or someone works at 03:00
 - (C) Async is always faster than sync
2. In an async-first team, a proposal is discussed by...
 - (A) Booking a 30-minute meeting
 - (B) Writing a one-page doc; colleagues comment in their own hours; a meeting only happens if the doc leaves an open question
 - (C) Chatting on Slack until people agree

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3. The cultural shift most extraverted members find hardest is...
 - (A) Learning to write more
 - (B) That a fast reply is not the same as a good one
 - (C) Learning a new tool
4. The trap of a badly-implemented async culture is...
 - (A) Nobody replies
 - (B) A documentation swamp — half-updated pages and contradictory decisions
 - (C) Too many meetings
5. The one non-negotiable ritual good async teams keep is...
 - (A) Daily standup
 - (B) A weekly DECISION LOG — every meaningful call captured with owner, date and link
 - (C) A weekly happy hour

Vocabulary in context

Match each distributed-team term to its plain-English meaning.

async-first — writing is the default; meetings are the exception

overlap window — the hours in the day when most of the team is online at once

handoff — passing work from one time zone to the next at end of day

single source of truth — the one doc / tool everyone agrees is authoritative

decision log — a running record of what was decided, by whom, when

default city — the location whose working hours the rest of the team bends around

Vocabulary: async work, time zones and team rituals

async-first — writing beats meeting by default

sync (call / meeting) — live, real-time conversation

a Loom / video message — recorded video sent for people to watch on their own time

a thread / a comment thread — a written conversation attached to a doc or channel

single source of truth — the one authoritative doc / tool

documentation debt — the accumulated disorder left when decisions go unrecorded

overlap window — hours when most of the team is online together

handoff / handover — passing work between time zones at end of day

follow-the-sun (adj.) — 24-hour coverage by rotating regions

timezone-blind (pejorative) — scheduling that is oblivious to where people actually live

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default city — the site whose hours everyone else bends around

always-on — expected to be perpetually reachable — usually a red flag

standup / daily — short daily check-in — often broken for distributed teams

async standup — written update in a thread instead of a live call

retro / retrospective — structured 'what worked / what didn't' at end of cycle

decision log — running record of decisions with owner and date

office hours — fixed window when someone is available for questions

no-meeting day — a protected day of the week for deep work

practice

Complete each sentence with *ONE* word / phrase.

1. We record the all-hands as a ____ so people across five time zones can watch it in their own hours.

2. Our ____ is 14:00–17:00 UTC — the only hours when Sydney, London and San Francisco are all awake.

3. Our team follows a ____ - ____ - ____ model — Berlin hands off to Bangalore at 18:00, Bangalore hands off to Austin at 09:00.

4. Nobody knows what was actually decided last quarter. Classic ____.

5. Wednesday is our ____ - ____ — the whole company protects it for deep work.

6. Every call gets summarised in the ____ — one line, owner, date, link.

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. The company is <u>moving to a model where writing beats meeting</u> to handle the global growth.

2. We have a three-hour <u>>window when the whole team is online</u> to discuss the strategy.

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3. The <u>accumulated disorder from unrecorded decisions</u> is making it hard for new hires to ramp up.

4. Please make sure to <u>capture the final agreement in the record</u> before you log off.

5. We use a <u>rotating regional model</u> to ensure we have 24-hour support coverage.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a proposal to your department head advocating for a shift towards an async-first culture to improve deep work.

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: Our current meeting-heavy culture is creating significant friction as we expand across time zones. Although we hit our targets, we are suffering from mounting documentation debt because decisions evaporate in unrecorded calls. I propose we transition to an async-first model, where writing is the default and meetings are the exception. We should establish a mandatory decision log to capture all outcomes, ensuring a single source of truth for every project. This will allow us to protect 'No-Meeting Wednesdays' for deep work, while using our three-hour overlap window for high-bandwidth creative sessions. In order to scale, we must move away from our current timezone-blind scheduling. Recommendation: we should pilot this async-standup ritual with the engineering squad for one month before a department-wide rollout to ensure the habit sticks.

Practice B — Async collocations

Match each verb to the noun it most naturally goes with in distributed-team language.

schedule — a meeting inside the overlap window

record — a Loom for the async audience

hand off — the work to the next time zone

capture — the decision in the log

protect — no-meeting days for deep work

unblock — a colleague who's waiting on you

Practice C — Build an async rhythm line

Use each cluster of words to write ONE sentence you could put in a team operating manual.

1. overlap window · 14:00–17:00 UTC · sync meetings only

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2. decision log · every meaningful call · owner · date

3. no-meeting Wednesday · deep work · protected

4. async standup · written thread · 24-hour window

Practice D — Odd one out

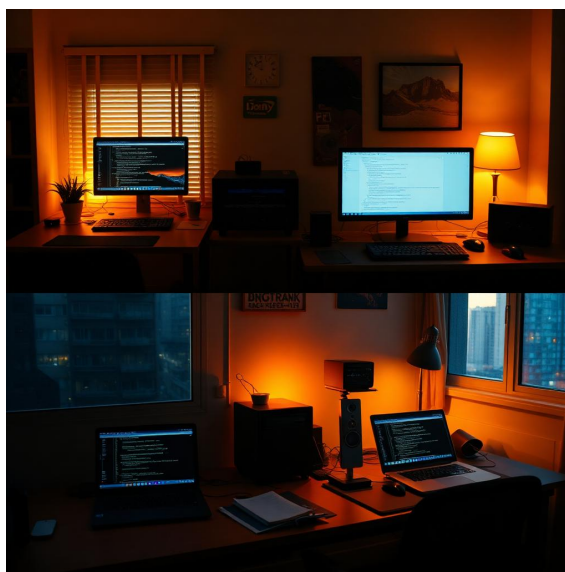
Which term in each group does NOT belong to the same family?

1. async-first · Loom · thread · always-on

2. overlap window · handoff · follow-the-sun · retro

3. decision log · single source of truth · documentation debt · office hours

4. no-meeting day · async standup · default city · deep work



Grammar focus: clauses of contrast & purpose

1. Contrast — followed by a CLAUSE (subject + verb) — ALTHOUGH / EVEN THOUGH / THOUGH + subject + verb. • 'ALTHOUGH the team is in five time zones, we ship weekly.' • 'We ship weekly, EVEN THOUGH the team is in five time zones.' (stronger) • 'The team is in five time zones, THOUGH.' (end position — means 'but') Rule: after the linker comes a full clause.

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2. Contrast — followed by a NOUN or -ING — IN SPITE OF / DESPITE + noun / -ing / the fact that + clause. • 'DESPITE the eight-hour gap, we agreed by Friday.' • 'DESPITE working across eight time zones, we agreed by Friday.' • 'DESPITE THE FACT THAT we work across eight time zones, we agreed by Friday.' ✗ 'Despite we work across eight time zones...' — NEVER a clause directly after despite/in spite of.

3. Contrast — between two full ideas (linkers) — HOWEVER / NEVERTHELESS = but (formal), between two sentences. • 'The team is in five time zones. HOWEVER, we ship weekly.' WHEREAS / WHILE = compare/contrast two things. • 'Berlin runs an async-first stack, WHEREAS Austin still defaults to meetings.' • 'WHILE the docs are excellent, the decision log is neglected.'

4. Purpose — the WHY of an action — TO / IN ORDER TO / SO AS TO + infinitive = one subject, positive purpose. • 'We record the town hall TO give async teammates equal access.' • 'IN ORDER TO protect deep work, we made Wednesday a no-meeting day.' • 'SO AS TO reduce meeting load, all decisions must start in a doc.' (formal) SO THAT + subject + can/will/would = purpose with a DIFFERENT subject or a modal. • 'We log every decision SO THAT future hires CAN see how we got here.' FOR + noun / -ing = short purpose. • 'This channel is FOR incident reports only.' IN CASE + subject + present = precaution. • 'We record every meeting IN CASE someone can't attend live.'

5. Common traps — • 'Despite of' ✗ → 'DESPITE' (no 'of') or 'IN SPITE OF'. • 'Although / Even though + noun' ✗ → 'Although THE MEETING WAS SHORT...' (needs subject + verb). • 'So that + infinitive' ✗ → 'so that + subject + can/will'. Use 'TO / IN ORDER TO' with an infinitive. • 'For to ship faster' ✗ → 'TO SHIP FASTER'. English does not use 'for' before an infinitive of purpose.

Exercise A — Complete with a CONTRAST linker

Complete each sentence with ONE contrast linker. More than one may be possible — pick the most natural.

1. ____ working across five time zones, the team hits every release date. (formal, followed by -ing)

2. ____ the retro was scheduled at 17:00 UTC, everyone from Sydney had to join at 03:00.

3. Berlin runs on an async-first stack, ____ Austin still defaults to standups.

4. The docs are excellent. ____, the decision log has been neglected for months. (formal, between two sentences)

5. ____ THE FACT THAT we protect Wednesdays, most people still book 'quick calls' on them.

Exercise B — Complete with a PURPOSE linker

Complete each sentence with the most natural PURPOSE linker (to / in order to / so that / in case / for).

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1. We record every town hall ____ give async teammates equal access.
2. Every decision is logged ____ future hires can see how we got here. (different subject)
3. Wednesday is a no-meeting day ____ protect deep work.
4. We keep an on-call rotation ____ something breaks overnight in Asia.
5. This channel is ____ incident reports only.

Exercise C — Rewrite an operating manual line

Combine each pair of ideas into ONE sentence using the linker in brackets.

1. The team is in five time zones. We ship weekly. (ALTHOUGH)
2. The gap is eight hours. We agreed by Friday. (DESPITE + noun)
3. We log every decision. Future hires can trace how the product got here. (SO THAT)
4. We record every meeting. Someone can't attend live. (IN CASE)
5. Berlin runs async-first. Austin still defaults to standups. (WHEREAS)

Listening: three team leads describe their weekly rhythm

You're the VP of Engineering hiring an Operations Lead to standardise how your six distributed squads work. You've asked three internal candidates to describe, in 90 seconds, their team's WEEKLY OPERATING RHYTHM. You're listening for: (1) who designs around time zones, (2) who names WHY each ritual exists, (3) who has a single source of truth, and (4) who confuses BUSY with EFFECTIVE.

pre

Which lead do you predict will win? What makes a rhythm well-designed for a distributed team?

What is ONE ritual on YOUR current team that shouldn't exist?

gist

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1. Which lead's rhythm gets adopted, and why?

2. Which lead runs a MEETING-HEAVY rhythm dressed as remote work?

3. Which lead has good instincts but no structure?

detail

1. What EXACTLY is Priya's overlap window, and what happens outside it?

2. What does Priya's DECISION LOG capture — and why does it matter?

3. Marco's team has a daily 09:00 CET standup. What's the hidden cost?

Third listen — designer vs default

Focus on HOW each lead THINKS about time and structure. Answer from what they DO with language.

1. Priya uses purpose clauses constantly ('so that Sydney doesn't dial in at 03:00', 'in case the launch breaks on a Friday'). What is that showing you as a hiring manager?

2. Marco keeps saying 'we just do a quick sync' and 'let's just get everyone on a call'. What does that language reveal?

3. Kwame uses hedges everywhere — 'usually', 'we try to', 'I think', 'kind of'. Why is that a distributed-team red flag?

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Language from the audio — distributed-team moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"Sync meetings are scheduled only inside the 14:00–17:00 UTC overlap window." — protects the rest of the day for deep work AND spreads the timezone pain evenly

"Every decision is captured in the log with a named owner and a date — so that future hires can trace how we got here." — purpose clause makes the ritual survive turnover; the log is a memory for the next generation

"Wednesdays are a no-meeting day, in order to protect deep work." — names the WHY — a ritual with an articulable purpose survives; one without doesn't

"We do a quick sync every morning at 09:00 — the whole team's there." — hidden cost: 'the whole team' can't be there, only the default-city hours; someone silently pays

"We're pretty async, I think — we use Notion a lot." — hedged rhythm — no named window, no named log, no protected day; the structure will collapse back to sync

"Async first — sync only when a doc can't resolve it." — the async-first rule in nine words — writing is the default, meeting is the exception

Voice A (Marco): So, our week: Monday 09:00 CET we do a 90-minute all-hands, everyone joins. Tuesday through Friday we have a daily standup at 09:00 CET — quick, 15 minutes, keeps everyone aligned. Thursday we have an unstructured team sync in the afternoon, sort of a hallway chat. We use Slack a lot; decisions kind of live there. Look, the team's in five time zones but everyone makes it work — Bangalore joins at 12:30, San Francisco... well, we're working on that. Our velocity is really high.

Voice B (Priya): OK. Our overlap window is 14:00 to 17:00 UTC — the only three hours where London, Berlin, Bangalore, Singapore and Austin are all awake. Sync meetings are scheduled ONLY inside that window, so that Sydney doesn't dial in at 03:00. Outside the window, work happens in written threads, docs, and Looms. Wednesdays are a no-meeting day in order to protect deep work. Every meaningful decision is captured in the decision log with a named owner and a date — so that future hires can trace how we got here, not so that I look organised. We keep a small on-call rotation in case the launch breaks on a Friday. That's the rhythm. It fits on one page.

Voice C (Kwame): Yeah, so we're pretty async, I think. We use Notion a lot, and, um, we try not to meet on Wednesdays — usually. There's a standup thread most days, kind of. Decisions... I mean, we sort of just remember them, or they end up in someone's DMs. It works, mostly. When it doesn't, we jump on a call. I think we're OK.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second operating rhythm

Solo task. Design (or describe) the WEEKLY OPERATING RHYTHM for your own team as if you were pitching it to a new hire. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds). You MUST include: (1) your OVERLAP WINDOW in UTC, (2) at least ONE clause of PURPOSE for each ritual you name ('so that...', 'in order to...', 'in case...'), (3) one CONTRAST clause acknowledging the trade-off ('although this means...' / 'despite the eight-hour gap...'), (4) where the DECISION LOG lives.

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Scene: Your real current team (recommended)

A: You pitch.

B: Imagined listener: a new hire on their first day.

Scene: A distributed side-project you'd like to start

A: You pitch.

B: Imagined listener: a co-founder in a different time zone.

Scene: A study group / community across time zones

A: You pitch.

B: Imagined listener: someone considering joining.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'one ritual, one why'

Compress your rhythm to **ONE** ritual you'll **INSTALL** next week — and the **WHY**. Record a **30-second voice note**. Format: 'Starting Monday, we'll ____, so that ____ / in order to ____, despite ____.'

Writing mini-task

Write the **ONE**-page 'How this team works' doc (max 120 words). Cover: **OVERLAP WINDOW**, **ASYNCH** **DEFAULTS**, **PROTECTED TIME**, **DECISION LOG** location. Every ritual must be followed by a **PURPOSE** clause ('so that...', 'in order to...'). Add **ONE CONTRAST** clause naming the trade-off. Sign it with a real role.

Wrap-up

One **CONTRAST** linker from today (although / despite / whereas / however) you'll use in this week's team update.

One **PURPOSE** clause you'll steal to justify a ritual — or to **KILL** one that no one can justify.

One thing you'll add to your team's decision log this week that would otherwise have evaporated.

Quiz

1. The 'brutal maths' of a distributed team is that...

(A) Async is always faster

(B) 'A quick sync' as the default means either the same time zones always win, or someone works at 03:00

(C) You need more meetings

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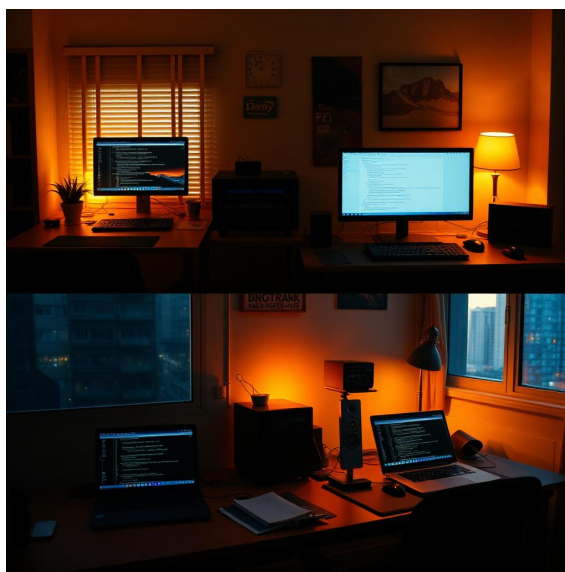


2. The correct pattern is...
 - (A) 'Despite of the eight-hour gap...'
 - (B) 'Despite the eight-hour gap...' — no 'of'
 - (C) 'Despite the gap is eight hours...'
3. The correct purpose clause is...
 - (A) 'We log decisions for to trace them.'
 - (B) 'We log decisions so that future hires can trace them.'
 - (C) 'We log decisions so that trace them.'
4. A well-designed async-first team...
 - (A) Bans meetings
 - (B) Uses writing as the default and books meetings only when a doc leaves an open question
 - (C) Requires everyone to be always-on
5. The single non-negotiable ritual for a good async team is...
 - (A) A daily standup
 - (B) A weekly DECISION LOG capturing every meaningful call with owner, date and link
 - (C) A quarterly offsite

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Async-team vocabulary

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

Word bank: overlap window · decision log · handoff · no-meeting day · async-first · documentation debt

1. Our ____ ____ is 14:00–17:00 UTC — the only three hours the whole team is awake at once.

2. Every meaningful call is captured in the ____ ____ with a named owner and date.

3. Berlin does a written ____ to Bangalore at 18:00 each day — a one-paragraph 'here's what we did'.

4. Wednesday is a company-wide ____ - ____ — safeguarded for deep, uninterrupted work.

5. We're ____ - ____: writing is the default, and meetings are the exception we have to justify.

6. Nobody can recall what was decided last quarter. A textbook case of ____ ____.

Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a proposal (120–180 words) to the Global Operations Team advocating for a shift in how the distributed team collaborates. Argue for specific rituals. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: overlap window, decision log, handoff, no-meeting day, async-first, or documentation debt.

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type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, organizational register.

Use clauses of purpose (e.g., 'so that', 'in order to').

Structure clearly: Current Challenges, Proposed Operating Rhythm, Expected Outcome.

model: Subject: Transitioning to an Async-First Operating Model To the Global Operations Team, To ensure our engineering team remains productivity across five time zones, we must fully embrace an async-first operating model. Our current reliance on live syncs is unsustainable, as it forces colleagues in Sydney and Bangalore to work outside their core hours. I propose we strictly limit synchronous meetings to our 14:00–17:00 UTC overlap window. Outside this time, all progress should be captured in a shared decision log to prevent documentation debt from accumulating. Furthermore, each region must provide a written handoff at the end of their shift to ensure a seamless transition between teams. To support this, we will also implement a company-wide no-meeting day on Wednesdays. These changes are designed to maximise our maker time while ensuring that every team member has equal access to the information required to execute their tasks.

Exercise 2 — Clauses of contrast

Rewrite each pair of ideas as ONE sentence, using the linker in brackets.

1. The team is in five time zones. We ship weekly. (ALTHOUGH)

2. The eight-hour gap. We agreed by Friday. (DESPITE + noun)

3. The docs are excellent. The decision log has been neglected for months. (HOWEVER)

4. Berlin runs async-first. Austin still defaults to standups. (WHEREAS)

5. We work across time zones. We hit every release date. (DESPITE + -ing)

Exercise 3 — Clauses of purpose

Complete each sentence with the most natural PURPOSE linker (to / in order to / so that / in case / for).

1. We record every town hall ___ give async teammates equal access.

2. Every decision is logged ___ future hires can trace how we got here.

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3. Wednesday is a no-meeting day ____ protect deep work.

4. We keep an on-call rotation ____ something breaks overnight in Asia.

5. This channel is ____ incident reports only.

6. The doc has a decision needed section ____ nobody wastes 48 hours guessing what we're asking.

Exercise 4 — Async-first or meeting-heavy?

Decide whether each team habit is *ASYNC-FIRST* (writing beats meeting) or *MEETING-HEAVY* (meetings ARE the work).

1. 'Every proposal is written as a one-pager; a meeting only happens if the doc leaves an open question.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
2. 'Daily 09:00 standup for everyone — even the two engineers who are asleep at 09:00 GMT.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
3. 'Every decision gets a one-paragraph write-up in a shared thread within 24h, tagged with owner and date.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
4. 'If something isn't in a meeting, it doesn't happen. Docs are for after the fact.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
5. 'Weekly "async town hall" — a 5-minute Loom + a written thread; comments allowed over 48h.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
6. 'Unstructured Thursday sync — everyone joins, no agenda, "just to chat".'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Rewrite meeting-heavy as async-first

Rewrite each meeting-heavy line as an async-first line using a PURPOSE clause.

1. 'Let's jump on a quick sync to align on the proposal.'

2. 'We should have a daily standup at 09:00 for everyone.'

3. 'Nobody remembers what we decided in the Q2 planning meeting.'

4. 'Ravi keeps interrupting deep work with "quick questions".'

Exercise 6 — Three team leads describe their weekly rhythm

You'll hear three leads pitch their weekly operating rhythm. Decide who should own the company-wide async standard.

1. Which lead's rhythm is adopted, and why?

2. Which lead runs meeting-heavy work dressed as remote?

3. Which lead has good instincts but no structure?

Voice A (Marco): Monday 09:00 CET all-hands, 90 minutes. Daily 09:00 standup Tuesday to Friday. Thursday afternoon unstructured sync. Decisions live in Slack. Bangalore joins at 12:30, San Francisco we're 'working on'. Velocity is high.

Voice B (Priya): Our overlap window is 14:00–17:00 UTC — the only three hours all five sites are awake. Sync meetings are scheduled ONLY inside that window, so that Sydney doesn't dial in at 03:00. Wednesdays are a no-meeting day, in order to protect deep work. Every meaningful decision is captured in the log with owner and date — so that future hires can trace how we got here. We keep on-call in case something breaks overnight in Asia. That's the rhythm. It fits on one page.

Voice C (Kwame): Yeah, we're pretty async, I think. We use Notion a lot, and we try not to meet on Wednesdays — usually. Standup thread most days, kind of. Decisions... we sort of remember them. When it doesn't work, we jump on a call. I think we're OK.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 7 — Write your team's operating rhythm

Write your OWN team's weekly operating rhythm as a ONE-page 'How this team works' doc (max 120 words). Cover: OVERLAP WINDOW (in UTC), ASYNC DEFAULTS, PROTECTED TIME, DECISION LOG. Every ritual must be followed by a PURPOSE clause ('so that...', 'in order to...', 'in case...'). Add ONE CONTRAST clause naming the trade-off.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: async-first or meeting-heavy?

1. → ASYNC-FIRST (writing is the default; meetings are the exception)
2. → MEETING-HEAVY, timezone-blind (default city wins; others burn)
3. → ASYNC-FIRST with a DECISION LOG (auditable, searchable, future-you can find it)
4. → OVERLAP-WINDOW model (protects deep work + preserves human contact)
5. → MEETING-HEAVY (meetings ARE the work; async is decoration)
6. → ASYNC RITUAL (replaces a live all-hands; scales across time zones)

Reading: The async-first team

1. (B) Insisting on 'a quick sync' means either the same time zones always win, or someone works at 03:00
2. (B) Writing a one-page doc; colleagues comment in their own hours; a meeting only happens if the doc leaves an open question
3. (B) That a fast reply is not the same as a good one
4. (B) A documentation swamp — half-updated pages and contradictory decisions
5. (B) A weekly DECISION LOG — every meaningful call captured with owner, date and link

Vocabulary: async work, time zones and team rituals

1. Loom / video message
 2. overlap window
 3. follow-the-sun
 4. documentation debt
 5. no-meeting day
 6. decision log
1. The company is moving to an async-first model to handle the global growth.
 2. We have a three-hour overlap window to discuss the strategy.
 3. The documentation debt is making it hard for new hires to ramp up.
 4. Please make sure to capture the final agreement in the decision log before you log off.
 5. We use a follow-the-sun model to ensure we have 24-hour support coverage.
1. Our overlap window is 14:00–17:00 UTC — sync meetings are scheduled only inside that window.
 2. Every meaningful call is captured in the decision log with a named owner and a date.
 3. Wednesday is protected as a no-meeting day so everyone can do deep work.
 4. The async standup is written in a thread; teammates post their update inside a 24-hour window.
1. always-on — the other three describe async work; always-on is a red-flag expectation of instant reply.
 2. retro — the other three describe time-zone architecture; a retro is a review ritual.
 3. office hours — the other three describe the health of your written record; office hours is an availability ritual.
 4. default city — the other three protect distributed work; a default city bends everyone else around one site.

Grammar focus: clauses of contrast & purpose

1. DESPITE / IN SPITE OF working across five time zones...
 2. ALTHOUGH / EVEN THOUGH the retro was scheduled at 17:00 UTC...
 3. WHEREAS / WHILE Austin still defaults to standups.
 4. HOWEVER, / NEVERTHELESS, the decision log has been neglected for months.
 5. DESPITE THE FACT THAT / IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT we protect Wednesdays...
1. TO / IN ORDER TO give async teammates equal access.
 2. SO THAT future hires can see how we got here.
 3. TO / IN ORDER TO protect deep work.
 4. IN CASE something breaks overnight in Asia.
 5. FOR incident reports only.
1. 'ALTHOUGH the team is in five time zones, we ship weekly.'
 2. 'DESPITE the eight-hour gap, we agreed by Friday.'
 3. 'We log every decision SO THAT future hires can trace how the product got here.'
 4. 'We record every meeting IN CASE someone can't attend live.'
 5. 'Berlin runs async-first, WHEREAS Austin still defaults to standups.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Listening: three team leads describe their weekly rhythm

1. Voice B (Priya). Async-first: proposals start in a one-page doc, an overlap window (14:00–17:00 UTC) protects live conversation, Wednesdays are no-meeting days, every decision lands in the log with owner and date. She NAMES the purpose of each ritual — 'so that Sydney doesn't dial in at 03:00', 'in case the launch breaks on a Friday'.
2. Voice A (Marco). Daily 09:00 CET standup for everyone (Bangalore joins at 12:30, San Francisco at 00:00), plus a 90-minute all-hands on Monday and an unstructured 'sync' on Thursday. No decision log — decisions live in someone's memory or in Slack. He confuses the volume of meetings with the amount of work happening.
3. Voice C (Kwame). 'We're pretty async, I think — we use Notion a lot.' Rituals exist but he can't articulate WHY. No named overlap window, no decision log, and 'Wednesdays we try not to meet — usually.' Six months from now the team will be back to daily meetings by default because nothing was ever formally protected.
1. 14:00–17:00 UTC — the only three-hour block where London, Berlin, Bangalore, Singapore and Austin are all awake. Sync meetings are scheduled ONLY inside that window. Outside it, work happens in written threads, docs and Looms. 'Async first — sync only when a doc can't resolve it.'
2. One line per decision: what was decided, WHO the owner is, the date, and a link to the doc where the reasoning lives. It matters because a decision without a written record is a decision that will be relitigated in six weeks by someone who wasn't in the meeting.
3. Bangalore joins at 12:30 (fine but slices their afternoon) and San Francisco joins at 00:00 (either they don't join, or their family life is compromised). The 'default city' is Berlin; the cost is silently paid by the sites furthest from Berlin. Nobody has quantified it — but Marco has 40% attrition in his San Francisco engineers.
1. Every ritual on Priya's team has a WHY she can name in one sentence. That means she designed the rhythm; she didn't inherit it. Rituals with articulable purpose survive contact with a new hire, a new time zone, a bad quarter. Rituals nobody can justify are the first thing that gets 'quickly rebooked' back to a default-city 09:00.
2. It reveals that live conversation is his default problem-solver — because it works for HIM, in Berlin. He is not designing a rhythm; he is running his own local rhythm at global scale. In practice, 'a quick sync' costs him 90 collective minutes and 3 hours of context-switch across the org, and produces no written artefact anyone can search later.
3. A distributed team can't run on 'usually'. Async trust depends on predictable rituals: colleagues in different time zones need to KNOW that Wednesday IS a no-meeting day, that the standup IS in a thread by 10:00 UTC, that a decision WILL land in the log within 48h. 'Usually' means each site quietly adopts its own version, and within a quarter the team is back to synchronous defaults.

Quiz

1. (B) 'A quick sync' as the default means either the same time zones always win, or someone works at 03:00
2. (B) 'Despite the eight-hour gap...' — no 'of'
3. (B) 'We log decisions so that future hires can trace them.'
4. (B) Uses writing as the default and books meetings only when a doc leaves an open question
5. (B) A weekly DECISION LOG capturing every meaningful call with owner, date and link

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Async-team vocabulary

1. overlap window
2. decision log
3. handoff
4. no-meeting day
5. async-first
6. documentation debt

Exercise 2 — Clauses of contrast

1. 'ALTHOUGH the team is in five time zones, we ship weekly.'
2. 'DESPITE the eight-hour gap, we agreed by Friday.'
3. 'The docs are excellent. HOWEVER, the decision log has been neglected for months.'
4. 'Berlin runs async-first, WHEREAS Austin still defaults to standups.'
5. 'DESPITE working across time zones, we hit every release date.'

Exercise 3 — Clauses of purpose

1. TO / IN ORDER TO
2. SO THAT
3. TO / IN ORDER TO
4. IN CASE
5. FOR
6. SO THAT

Exercise 4 — Async-first or meeting-heavy?

1. (A) ASYNC-FIRST
2. (B) MEETING-HEAVY
3. (A) ASYNC-FIRST
4. (B) MEETING-HEAVY
5. (A) ASYNC-FIRST
6. (B) MEETING-HEAVY

Exercise 5 — Rewrite meeting-heavy as async-first

1. Model: 'I've written the proposal up as a one-pager and shared it in #product-async. Please comment inside the doc by Thursday 17:00 UTC, SO THAT anyone in Bangalore or Sydney can weigh in during their own working hours. We'll only book a live call if the doc leaves an open question.'
2. Model: 'Standup will move to an async format — a written update in #daily by 10:00 local time — SO THAT nobody has to dial in outside their working hours. Live syncs happen only inside our 14:00–17:00 UTC overlap window.'
3. Model: 'Starting this quarter, every meaningful call lands in the DECISION LOG with owner, date and a link to the doc, IN ORDER TO make decisions searchable — SO THAT a new hire in month six can trace how we got here.'
4. Model: 'I'll hold OFFICE HOURS Tuesday 15:00–16:00 UTC — a fixed window when I'm available for questions. IN CASE something is truly blocking, ping in #urgent; everything else goes to office hours, SO THAT the rest of the day is protected for deep work.'

Exercise 6 — Three team leads describe their weekly rhythm

1. Voice B (Priya) — named overlap window (14:00–17:00 UTC), no-meeting Wednesday, decision log with owner+date, and — critically — a PURPOSE clause after every ritual ('so that Sydney doesn't dial in at 03:00').
2. Voice A (Marco) — daily 09:00 CET standup for everyone (Bangalore joins at 12:30, San Francisco at 00:00), no decision log, decisions live in Slack. Confuses meeting volume with productivity; 40% San Francisco attrition.
3. Voice C (Kwame) — 'We're pretty async, I think', 'we try not to meet on Wednesdays — usually'. Hedged rhythm, no named window, no decision log; the structure will drift back to sync within a quarter.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
