



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 6 · B1·6A

Meetings that actually finish on time

Theme · Meetings basics

Unit 6 · B1·6A

Meetings that actually finish on time

Theme: Meetings basics

B1 · Business English



Learning objectives

- Open, run and close a short meeting using clear signposting language.
- Talk about meeting rules and expectations with should, must and have to.
- Give and defend a meeting policy in one calm sentence.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Meeting confessions

Read each confession. Say TRUE for you, FALSE for you, or SOMETIMES. Be ready to justify your last TRUE in one sentence.

I've sat through a meeting this month that could have been an email.

I've said 'let's take that offline' when I meant 'stop talking'.

I've joined a meeting without reading the agenda.

I've muted myself and done other work.

I've been late to a meeting and lied about the reason.

Lead-in: what would you actually do?

Four typical meeting situations. For each one, decide what you would ACTUALLY do — then compare with a partner. There are no wrong answers, only honest ones.

kind: scenarios

1. **emoji:** 🤨 · **title:** The 10-minute overrun · **situation:** The meeting was supposed to end 10 minutes ago. The organiser is still going. You have a hard stop.

2. **emoji:** 🤨 · **title:** No agenda · **situation:** You've been added to a 60-minute meeting with a vague title and no agenda. It starts in 20 minutes.

3. **emoji:** 🤨 · **title:** The dominator · **situation:** One colleague has been talking for 12 minutes straight. Two quieter people haven't said a word.

4. **emoji:** 🤨 · **title:** The mystery decision · **situation:** The meeting is ending. Someone said 'let's go with option B'. You're not sure who owns it or by when.

followUp: Which of these do you find HARDEST to say out loud in English? Rank them 1–4.

Reading · The 3 rules of a meeting that ends on time

Every good manager has a mental checklist for meetings — and it fits on a napkin. Rule one: no agenda, no meeting. If nobody wrote down what the meeting is for, the meeting is a conversation. Have a conversation instead — it's shorter.

Rule two: name the owner and the decision before you leave the room. A meeting that ends with 'we'll figure it out' figures out nothing. A meeting that ends with 'Marta owns it, decision by Friday' has moved the ball.

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Rule three: end early when you can. If the room finishes in 22 minutes instead of 30, give the eight minutes back. Nobody has ever complained about getting time back. And people remember who does it — they trust that person's meetings.

1. What does 'no agenda, no meeting' mean in practice?
 - (A) Meetings are optional
 - (B) Without a written purpose, it's just a conversation
 - (C) Send the agenda in advance or after
2. According to the text, what makes a meeting 'move the ball'?
 - (A) Everyone speaking
 - (B) Naming an owner and a decision
 - (C) Taking notes
3. Why is ending early powerful?
 - (A) Nobody complains and people remember
 - (B) It saves money
 - (C) It shows the meeting was well-prepared

Vocabulary in context

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

- agenda** — the written list of what a meeting will cover
- owner** — the person responsible for a task or decision
- move the ball** — make real progress towards a goal
- give ... back** — return unused time or resources

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text, choose the correct option.

1. The author says every meeting should last 30 minutes.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
2. A meeting without an agenda is really just a conversation.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given

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3. 'We'll figure it out' is a successful meeting close.
- (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
4. People trust managers who give time back.
- (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
5. The author blames senior leaders for bad meetings.
- (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given

React to the text

Discuss briefly. There is no single correct answer.

1. Of the three rules, which one is most broken at YOUR company?

2. Is there a fourth rule you would add?

Scan for meaning

Find the phrase in the text that matches each definition.

1. the written plan of what a meeting will cover

2. the person who is responsible

3. make real, measurable progress

4. return time that wasn't used

Vocabulary · Running a meeting

an agenda — the written list of topics for a meeting

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the chair (of the meeting) — the person who leads and controls it

minutes — the written record of what was decided

AOB — 'any other business' — final slot for unlisted topics

an action item — a task assigned to a specific owner

a hard stop — a fixed end-time you cannot move

to kick off — to start a meeting or project

to signpost — to say clearly what you're going to do next

to park (an issue) — to postpone a topic to keep on schedule

to loop in (someone) — to include them by email or invite

to take (something) offline — to discuss it later, outside the meeting

to wrap up — to conclude and summarise

practice

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

1. Let's ____ ____ — thanks everyone for being on time.

2. I've got a ____ ____ at 3 — can we start with item 4?

3. Good point, but let's ____ that and come back on Friday.

4. Can we ____ Priya ____? She'll have the data.

5. Let's ____ ____ — action items are Marc by Tuesday, Ana by Thursday.

6. Sorry, that's off-topic — can we ____ it ____?

Collocations · meeting verbs

Match each verb with the noun it usually goes with.

set — an agenda

take — the minutes

chair — a meeting

assign — an action item

reach — a decision

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postpone — a discussion

Odd one out

Choose the word that does NOT belong.

1. agenda · minutes · action item · invoice

(A) agenda

(B) minutes

(C) action item

(D) invoice

2. chair · attend · park · deliver

(A) chair

(B) attend

(C) park

(D) deliver

3. kick off · wrap up · sign off · look up

(A) kick off

(B) wrap up

(C) sign off

(D) look up

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair.

1. to decide → a ____

2. to discuss → a ____

3. to attend → an ____

4. to agree → an ____

5. to postpone → a ____

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Grammar · should / must / have to

- 1. should** → **advice / a good idea** — • You should send the agenda the day before. • You shouldn't check email during a meeting.
- 2. must** → **strong personal rule / speaker's authority** — • You must silence your phone before the meeting starts. • I must remember to send the minutes today.
- 3. have to** → **external rule / requirement from outside** — • We have to attend the Monday stand-up — the company requires it. • She had to leave early because of another meeting.
- 4. mustn't ≠ don't have to** — • You mustn't record the call. = it's forbidden. • You don't have to record the call. = it's optional.
- 5. Meeting-friendly patterns** — • The chair should keep to time. • Attendees have to arrive on time. • You mustn't share confidential slides externally. • You don't have to speak — but you can if you want to.

Exercise A — should, must, or have to?

Choose the best option for each context (sometimes more than one is possible; pick the strongest fit).

1. Company policy: every meeting over 20 minutes ____ have an agenda.

2. Advice: you ____ read the pre-read before the call — it saves everyone time.

3. Confidentiality: you ____ share the slides outside the company.

4. Practical: I ____ leave at 3 — the metro closes at 3:10.

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5. Optional: you ____ join Friday's optional social — but it's fun.

6. Personal rule: I ____ remember to switch off notifications during 1-to-1s.

Exercise B — find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. You don't must record the call.

2. The manager has to attends the review every quarter.

3. You should to send the agenda the day before.

4. We must to leave by 4.

Exercise C — 'mustn't' vs 'don't have to'

Complete with mustn't or don't have to.

1. You ____ turn your camera on — it's an optional-camera call.

2. You ____ share the client's name outside this room.

3. Attendees ____ speak — silent listeners are welcome.

4. You ____ forward the deck to anyone outside legal.

Exercise D — write the meeting rule

For each situation, write ONE meeting rule for your team, using should / must / have to.

1. People keep joining without reading the pre-read.

2. Meetings drift beyond the scheduled end.

3. Nobody knows who owns the follow-up.

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4. Confidential client work is sometimes shown in shared rooms.
-

Exercise E — about YOUR meetings

Answer each question with *ONE* full sentence. Use *should*, *must* or *have to*.

1. What is ONE thing your colleagues have to do at every meeting?
-

2. What is ONE thing they mustn't do?
-

3. What is ONE thing they don't have to do (but many think they must)?
-

Exercise F — polite meeting phrases

Complete each phrase.

1. Signposting: 'Let's ____ with the first item on the agenda.'
-

2. Interrupting politely: 'Sorry to ____ — quick question on that.'
-

3. Parking a topic: 'Great point — can we ____ that and pick it up on Friday?'
-

4. Closing: 'To ____, action items are Marc by Tuesday, Ana by Thursday.'
-

Listening · The team lead who cut meetings in half

A team lead is asked how she reduced her team's meeting load from 22 hours a week to 11. Listen for the three rules she introduced — and how she defended them when the pushback came.

pre

If you had to cut your meetings by 50% next week, what would you cut FIRST?

Have you ever pushed back on a meeting invite? What did you say?

gist

1. By how much did she cut the team's meetings?
-
-
-

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2. What are her three rules, in one line each?

3. What was the biggest source of pushback?

detail

1. What did she do with the extra 5–10 minutes she gave back?

2. How did she handle a senior colleague who kept sending invites without agendas?

3. What did her team's engagement scores do after 3 months?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. Is she anti-meeting, or pro-good-meeting?

2. Would she call this an easy change? Why or why not?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"No agenda, no meeting — I'll catch it async." — polite decline of an unclear invite

"Could you drop 2 bullets on the outcome?" — asking for a light agenda without sounding demanding

"25 or 50 minutes — never 30 or 60." — structural rule that creates breathing room

"Camera optional — no explanation needed." — removing a small daily social tax

"I held the line for two weeks." — personal commitment to a new rule

Voice A: So — 22 hours of meetings a week, down to 11. What did you actually change?

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Voice B: Three rules. First: no agenda, no meeting. If the invite doesn't say what we're deciding, I don't accept — I catch up async.

Voice A: That must have upset people.

Voice B: Yes. For about two weeks. I got called 'too corporate' twice. I just held the line — I kept declining, politely. I'd reply: 'happy to join — could you drop two bullets on the outcome? Otherwise I'll catch up async.' After two weeks, the invites started coming with agendas.

Voice A: Rule two?

Voice B: 25 or 50 minutes — never 30 or 60. It sounds silly but it gives everyone five to ten minutes between calls. Nobody sprints across the office anymore.

Voice A: And the third?

Voice B: Camera optional. Named it out loud on day one. No explanation needed if you're off camera. That one was easy — people were grateful within a week.

Voice A: Did engagement scores drop?

Voice B: The opposite. Highest jump in the department. Turns out people don't hate their job — they hate their calendar.

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Complete the exact phrases from the interview.

1. No ____, no meeting.

2. Could you ____ two bullets on the outcome?

3. 25 or 50 minutes — ____ 30 or 60.

4. Camera optional — no ____ needed.

5. I ____ the ____ for two weeks.

Speaking · The 60-second meeting policy

Choose ONE meeting problem at your (real or imagined) company. Prepare a 60-second oral policy. Use AT LEAST one sentence with must/mustn't, one with have to / don't have to, and one with should.

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Scene: The meeting-that-should-be-an-email

A: You: the team lead. Announce the new rule to your team.

B: You: a skeptical colleague. Push back ONCE — the team lead has to defend the rule.

Scene: The dominator

A: You: the chair. Interrupt a colleague who's been talking for 8 minutes.

B: You: the dominator. React — apologise, negotiate, or push back.

Scene: The camera-optional call

A: You: announce that cameras are now optional in Monday stand-ups.

B: You: a manager who fears people will disengage. Ask ONE tough question.

Class discussion

Vote as a class: which meeting rule would have the biggest impact if your company adopted it tomorrow?

Ban meetings without an agenda.

Cap all meetings at 25 or 50 minutes.

Cameras optional by default.

No meetings on Wednesdays.

Role-play · declining an invite

Two people. Student A sends a meeting invite. Student B has to decline politely but firmly, using at least one modal (should / must / have to / don't have to).

Scene: Vague 'catch-up' at 5 p.m. Friday

A: Student A: convince Student B to attend — 'it's only 30 minutes'.

B: Student B: decline politely. Offer an async alternative.

Scene: A meeting you were added to by mistake

A: Student A: 'we need your input on Client-Y'.

B: Student B: check if you really have to be there. Offer a written note instead.

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Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

Word bank: agenda · hard stop · park · loop in · wrap up · kick off

1. Let's ____ — thanks everyone for being here.

2. No ____, no meeting — that's our new team rule.

3. I've got a ____ at 3 — can we start with item 4?

4. Great point, but let's ____ it and come back on Friday.

5. Can you ____ Priya? She'll have the data.

6. Let's ____ — action items are Marc by Tuesday, Ana by Thursday.

2. should / must / have to

Complete each sentence with the best modal for the meaning in brackets.

1. (external rule) Every meeting over 20 minutes ____ have an agenda.

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2. (strong personal rule) I ____ silence my phone before the call starts.

3. (advice) You ____ send the pre-read the day before.

4. (forbidden) You ____ share confidential slides outside the company.

5. (optional) You ____ turn your camera on — it's optional.

6. (practical) I ____ leave at 3 — my next call is at 3:05.

3. Choose the best polite phrase

Choose the option that sounds most professional in a meeting.

1. Opening a meeting:

(A) Ok, we start.

(B) Let's kick off — thanks for being on time.

(C) Attention everyone.

2. Interrupting a colleague:

(A) Stop talking, please.

(B) Sorry to jump in — quick question on that.

(C) Let me speak now.

3. Parking a topic:

(A) That's off-topic.

(B) Great point — can we park it and pick it up Friday?

(C) Not today.

4. Closing a meeting:

(A) We finish.

(B) To wrap up: Marc by Tuesday, Ana by Thursday.

(C) Bye.

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. You don't must record the call.

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2. The manager has to attend the review.

3. You should send the agenda in advance.

4. We must leave by 4.

5. Listening — three meeting openings

Three team leads open the same weekly meeting. Decide who sets it up for a productive 30 minutes and who wastes the first five.

1. Which opening is **CLEAREST**?

2. Which is **WORST**?

3. Which one gives permission **NOT** to attend next time?

Voice A: OK, so, morning everyone. Let's... see where we are today. Who wants to start? Maybe Ana? Or Marc?

Voice B: Morning. Two decisions today, 25 minutes, hard stop at :55. Decision one: do we launch the pilot on the 12th or the 19th? Decision two: who owns the client email. If we finish early, we give the time back.

Voice C: Morning. Quick check first — is this meeting still earning its slot? If today becomes another status readout, we should kill this meeting and move to a Monday note. Agreed? Great. Then let's move.

6. Writing — a 4-sentence meeting policy

Write a 4-sentence meeting policy for your team. Sentence 1: use 'must' or 'have to' (a rule). Sentence 2: use 'should' (advice). Sentence 3: use 'mustn't' (forbidden). Sentence 4: use 'don't have to' (optional). Max 80 words.

7. Case study preview

Before you start Case Study 6, answer briefly.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. How many hours a week do you spend in meetings? How many of those hours are 'good' meetings?

2. If your manager told you tomorrow 'cut your meetings by 50%', which one would you cut first — and how would you justify it?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Reading · The 3 rules of a meeting that ends on time

1. (B) Without a written purpose, it's just a conversation
2. (B) Naming an owner and a decision
3. (A) Nobody complains and people remember
1. (C) Not Given
2. (A) True
3. (B) False
4. (A) True
5. (C) Not Given
1. Model: rule two. We name owners in the meeting, but nobody writes them down — so by Monday, nobody remembers who owns what.
2. Model: no laptops for the first 10 minutes. Otherwise nobody is really in the room.
1. agenda
2. owner
3. move the ball
4. give ... back

Vocabulary · Running a meeting

1. kick off
2. hard stop
3. park
4. loop ... in
5. wrap up
6. take ... offline
1. (D) invoice
2. (D) deliver
3. (D) look up
1. decision
2. discussion
3. attendee / attendance
4. agreement
5. postponement

Grammar · should / must / have to

1. has to (external rule)
2. should
3. mustn't (forbidden)
4. have to
5. don't have to
6. must
1. You mustn't record the call. (OR: You don't have to record the call. — meaning changes)
2. The manager has to attend the review every quarter.
3. You should send the agenda the day before.
4. We must leave by 4. (OR: We have to leave by 4.)
1. don't have to
2. mustn't
3. don't have to
4. mustn't
1. Model: attendees have to read the 1-page pre-read before joining.
2. Model: the chair must end the meeting at :55 past the hour, whatever happens.
3. Model: we should name an owner and a due date for every action item, out loud, before we close.
4. Model: you mustn't discuss Client-X projects in open-plan or shared meeting rooms.
1. Model: they have to switch cameras on during our weekly 1-to-1.
2. Model: they mustn't discuss client names in a public café — it's a firm rule.

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3. Model: they don't have to attend meetings marked 'FYI, optional' — it's genuinely optional.

1. kick off
2. jump in
3. park
4. wrap up

Listening · The team lead who cut meetings in half

1. From 22 hours a week to 11 — a 50% reduction.
2. (1) No agenda, no meeting. (2) 25 or 50 minutes — never 30 or 60. (3) 'Camera optional' — she named it out loud on day 1.
3. The 'no agenda' rule — people said it was 'too corporate'. She held the line by declining agenda-less invites for two weeks.
1. Nothing forced — she said the whole point was that people GOT the time, not that she filled it.
2. She replied privately: 'happy to join — could you drop 2 bullets on the outcome? Otherwise I'll catch up async.'
3. Went up — the highest jump in her department.
1. Pro-good-meeting. She defends meetings that decide things — she cuts the ones that don't.
2. No — she mentions two weeks of pushback and says she had to hold the line personally. It only works if the manager doesn't blink.
1. agenda
2. drop
3. never
4. explanation
5. held / line

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. kick off
2. agenda
3. hard stop
4. park
5. loop in
6. wrap up

2. should / must / have to

1. has to
2. must
3. should
4. mustn't
5. don't have to
6. have to

3. Choose the best polite phrase

1. (B) Let's kick off — thanks for being on time.
2. (B) Sorry to jump in — quick question on that.
3. (B) Great point — can we park it and pick it up Friday?
4. (B) To wrap up: Marc by Tuesday, Ana by Thursday.

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. You mustn't record the call. (OR: You don't have to record the call. — meaning changes)
2. The manager has to attend the review.
3. You should send the agenda in advance.
4. We must leave by 4. (OR: We have to leave by 4.)

5. Listening — three meeting openings

1. Voice B — states the goal, the time budget, and the two decisions to make.
2. Voice A — vague ('so... let's see where we are today') with no agenda and no time budget.
3. Voice C — 'if this becomes a status readout again, we should kill this meeting'.

7. Case study preview

1. Model: about 18 hours a week. Maybe 6 are genuinely useful — the rest are status updates I could read in 3 minutes.
2. Model: the weekly all-team update. Nobody speaks, nobody remembers what was said. I'd propose a written Monday note instead — same information, 10 minutes to read, no calendar block.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class