



APEX ENGLISH

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B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 6 · B6B

Deep work

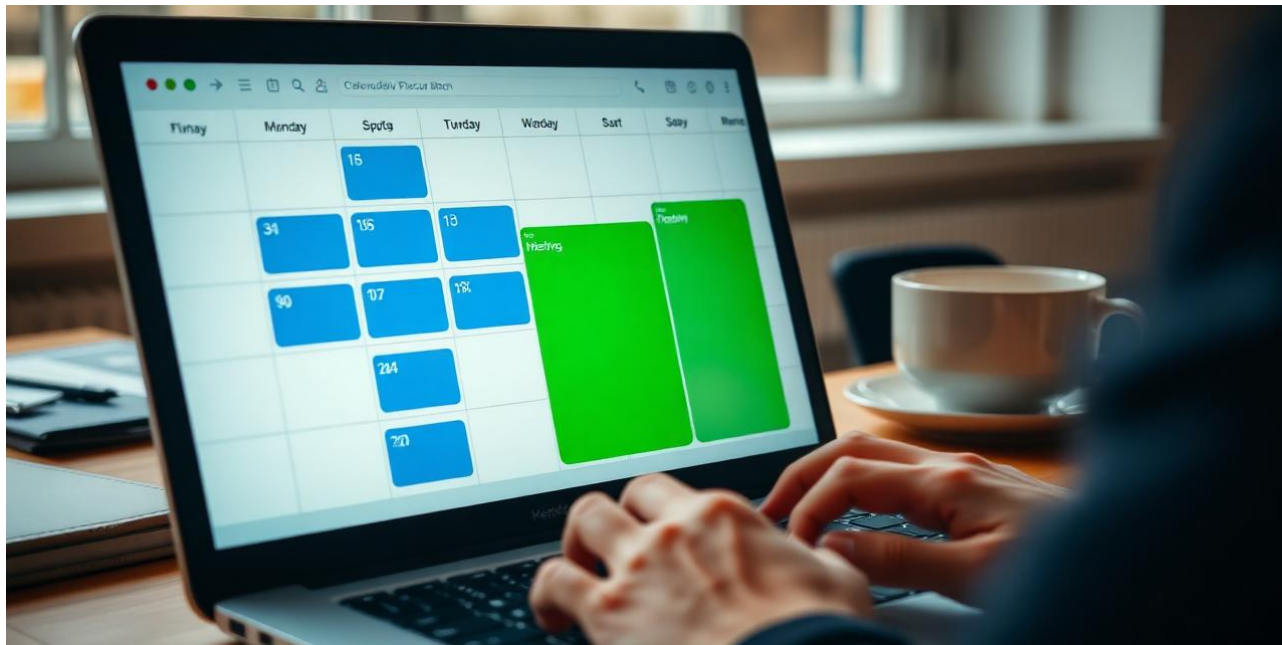
Theme · Processes & Habits



Unit 6 · B6B

Deep work

Theme: Processes & Habits



Learning objectives

- Negotiate protected focus time without sounding precious or anti-team.
- Use gerunds and infinitives correctly — the choice is meaning, not decoration.
- Name the difference between maker time and manager time, and defend it out loud.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The last hour that mattered

Open your calendar. Look at the **LAST** full working day. In 45 seconds out loud: name the **ONE** hour where you did work that only **YOU** could have done. If you can't find one, that **IS** the finding. Record a 30-second voice note about what filled that hour instead.

The 'only you' hour — was it a meeting or maker time?

How many meetings did you attend where you were the fourth-most-relevant person in the room?

What **ONE** meeting from yesterday would nothing have been worse if you'd skipped?

Bonus: is your calendar working **FOR** you — or are you working for your calendar?

Lead-in: maker or manager?

Decide: **MAKER TIME** (deep, single-threaded) or **MANAGER TIME** (coordination).

1. Writing the first draft of the Q3 strategy doc.

2. A 30-min 1:1 with your direct report.

3. Redesigning the pricing model in a spreadsheet.

4. Chairing a 45-min cross-functional stand-up.

followUp: What's the right **MAKER/MANAGER** mix for your role?

MAKER TIME

MANAGER TIME

Reading: Maker time, manager time, and why they don't share a calendar

The essay that named this problem is nearly two decades old and it still cuts. Paul Graham argued that there are two schedules — the manager's schedule (chopped into one-hour meeting blocks; a meeting doesn't 'cost' anything) and the maker's schedule (needs half-days or full days; a single interruption at 11am kills the whole afternoon). Both are legitimate. The trouble starts when they share a calendar, because a manager's 'quick 30-minute sync' at 2pm doesn't cost the manager anything — but it costs the maker the entire afternoon of work they were building up to.

The grammar you need for this negotiation is gerunds and infinitives, and the choice matters. 'I stopped to check email' means I paused what I was doing **IN ORDER TO** check email — a deliberate break. 'I stopped checking email' means I quit the habit entirely — no more email at all. The verb 'stop' with -ing and 'stop' with 'to' are two different sentences. Same with 'remember to send' (you haven't sent it yet, please do) vs 'remember sending' (you sent it, and you have a memory of doing so). At B2, most

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



professionals stop making basic gerund/infinitive mistakes but keep making the ones where the choice IS the meaning — and in a negotiation about focus time, those are exactly the ones that trip you up.

The other trap in defending focus time is language that sounds precious. 'I need my morning to be sacred' loses the room. 'I'm most useful to the team when I do the deep work in the morning and the coordination work in the afternoon' wins it. The word 'useful' does the work: you're not asking for a favour, you're describing how you produce the most value. Give a manager a way to say yes without feeling they've conceded something to a diva, and they will.

1. The 'maker's schedule vs manager's schedule' idea is that...
 - (A) Makers are more productive than managers
 - (B) The two schedules cost interruptions differently — a 30-min meeting doesn't hurt a manager but can kill a maker's afternoon
 - (C) Managers don't need calendars
2. 'I stopped to check email' means...
 - (A) I quit checking email
 - (B) I paused what I was doing IN ORDER TO check email
 - (C) I never check email
3. 'I stopped checking email' means...
 - (A) I paused for a moment
 - (B) I quit the habit — no more email checking
 - (C) I still check it
4. 'I need my morning to be sacred' is criticised because it...
 - (A) Is grammatically wrong
 - (B) Sounds precious and loses the room
 - (C) Is too polite

Vocabulary in context

Match the focus / productivity term to its plain-English meaning.

deep work — cognitively demanding tasks done in unbroken focus

shallow work — logistical, low-focus tasks (email, chat, admin)

context switch — the cost of moving your brain between two different problems

focus block — a chunk of calendar time protected from meetings

asynchronous / async — communication that doesn't need everyone online at the same time

meeting overload — so many meetings that no real work gets done between them

Vocabulary: focus, productivity, meetings vs maker time

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



in the flow / in flow state — the mental zone where deep work happens easily

protect focus time — block calendar time nobody can book over

batch (v.) — consolidate similar small tasks into one dedicated window

single-thread (v.) — work on one thing at a time, no parallel tabs

'no-meeting day' — a whole day with meetings banned by team agreement

double-book (v.) — have two calendar events at the same time

decline (a meeting) — turn down a calendar invite tactfully

async update — a written status people read on their own time — replaces a meeting

meeting-free block — a chunk of the week nobody can put a meeting in

'this could have been an email' — the sarcastic verdict on a meeting that produced nothing

I'm most useful when... — frame focus time as team value, not personal preference

let me shift that to... — counter-offer a better time instead of just saying no

protect the work — the professional phrase for safeguarding focus time

on the record for the team — make the norm visible so everyone benefits, not just you

a calendar you can defend — one where each meeting has a clear reason you can name

practice

Complete each sentence with *ONE* word / phrase.

1. I ___ my Slack and email triage into two 20-minute windows a day — otherwise it's continuous.

2. Wednesday is a team ___ - ___ — no internal calls before 3pm.

3. That's not a decline, that's a counter-offer: let me ___ that ___ 4pm — I'll be better prepared.

4. I'm not being difficult — I'm ___ so we ship the strategy doc on time.

5. Frame it as 'I'm ___ when I do writing in the morning' — the manager sells that to their boss.

6. Honestly? That two-hour review meeting — ___.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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. I consolidate similar small tasks into one window for Slack and email — otherwise it's continuous.

2. Wednesday is a team day with meetings banned — no internal calls before 3pm.

3. That's not a decline, that's a counter-offer: let me move that to 4pm — I'll be better prepared.

4. I'm not being difficult — I'm safeguarding my focus time so we ship the strategy doc on time.

5. Honestly? That two-hour review meeting — produced nothing that couldn't have been an email .

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short memo to your manager proposing protected focus time for your team, framed as team value rather than personal preference.

Use at least FOUR of the target expressions from this unit.

Adopt a professional register: concise, structured, executive-friendly.

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

sample: Subject: Proposal — Protected Focus Time I'm most useful to the team when I do deep work in the morning and coordination in the afternoon. Right now, Monday's 9am sync kills my only three-hour maker block of the week — a 30-minute meeting effectively costs three hours of output. Proposal: let me shift status updates to an async format, and let's make Wednesday mornings a no-meeting block for the whole team, not just me — on the record, so everyone benefits. I'll batch Slack and email into two daily windows instead of checking continuously. This isn't about being precious; it's about protecting the work. Recommendation: trial this for two weeks and measure whether output improves.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar focus: Gerunds and infinitives

1. The rule you can't rule out — verb + gerund vs verb + infinitive — Some verbs are followed by GERUND (-ing): enjoy, avoid, finish, keep, mind, suggest, recommend, consider, imagine, deny, admit, risk, delay, put off, involve. • 'I enjoy WORKING alone in the morning.' • 'I've finished DRAFTING the doc.' • 'Would you consider MOVING the meeting?' Some verbs are followed by INFINITIVE (to + verb): agree, decide, hope, plan, offer, refuse, promise, need, want, would like, tend, seem, afford, manage, learn. • 'I decided TO DECLINE the meeting.' • 'I need TO PROTECT Wednesday morning.' • 'She refused TO CANCEL the stand-up.' At B2 you know most of these; the risk is auto-piloting on the wrong pattern under pressure.

2. Verbs where the meaning changes — STOP — 'I stopped TO CHECK email' → I paused what I was doing IN ORDER TO check email. (deliberate pause) 'I stopped CHECKING email' → I quit the habit entirely. (no more email checking) Same verb, opposite meaning. The 'to' = purpose; the '-ing' = the activity that stopped.

3. Verbs where the meaning changes — REMEMBER / FORGET / TRY — REMEMBER: • 'Please REMEMBER TO SEND the deck.' → You haven't sent it yet. Do it. • 'I REMEMBER SENDING it — I clicked at 4pm.' → You sent it; you have a memory of doing so. FORGET: • 'Don't FORGET TO CANCEL Wednesday's meeting.' → It's not cancelled yet. • 'I'll never FORGET CANCELLING that meeting — it saved the quarter.' → I cancelled it; I remember. TRY: • 'I TRIED TO PROTECT the morning.' → I made the attempt (maybe it failed). • 'TRY BLOCKING Wednesday afternoons.' → Experiment with this technique.

4. Common traps — • After PREPOSITIONS, always -ing: 'I'm interested IN protecting focus time' / 'thanks FOR moving the meeting' / 'good AT saying no'. Never 'thanks for to move'. • 'I look forward TO HEARING' — 'to' here is a preposition (in the phrase 'look forward to'), so -ing follows. Common mistake: 'I look forward to hear' ✗.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

**Exercise A — Gerund or infinitive?**

Put the verb in brackets in the correct form.

1. I decided ____ (decline) the Friday sync — nothing was going to happen in it.

2. Would you consider ____ (move) our 1:1 to Tuesday afternoon?

3. Please remember ____ (send) the pre-read 24 hours before the meeting.

4. I remember ____ (send) it — I have the email in my sent folder from 4pm.

5. I'm interested in ____ (protect) Wednesday mornings for team-wide deep work.

6. She refused ____ (cancel) the stand-up, even though nobody had anything to say.

7. I look forward to ____ (hear) how the pilot goes.

8. Try ____ (batch) your email into two 20-minute windows — see if it changes your afternoons.

Exercise B — Same verb, different meaning

Choose the form (gerund or infinitive) that matches the meaning in brackets.

1. I stopped (to check / checking) email at 6am. (...I quit that habit)

2. I stopped (to check / checking) email at 6am. (...I paused what I was doing to look at email)

3. Please remember (to cancel / cancelling) tomorrow's meeting. (...it isn't cancelled yet)

4. I'll never forget (to cancel / cancelling) that meeting — it saved us six hours a week. (...I already did it)

5. I tried (to protect / protecting) Wednesday morning. (...I made the attempt — it may have failed)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



6. Try (to block / blocking) Wednesdays — it might work. (...experiment with this technique)

Exercise C — Rewrite as a focus-time negotiation

Rewrite each blunt statement into a sentence a manager can say yes to — using the right gerund/infinitive AND focus-time vocabulary.

1. 'I don't want to come to your Monday meeting.'

2. 'Stop scheduling stuff on Wednesday mornings.'

3. 'I forgot to reply to your Slack.'

4. 'I hate all these meetings.'

Listening: three people defend their focus time

A director is triaging three of her reports who all pushed back on a new company-wide Monday 9am stand-up. She's deciding which pushback is legitimate, which is fixable, and which is just complaining. You're picking whose case she'll take to the CEO.

pre

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

What is ONE meeting on YOUR calendar this week that you'd defend cancelling — and how would you frame it?

gist

1. Which speaker wins the case, and why?

2. Which speaker sounds precious and loses the room?

3. Which speaker is warm and reasonable but never actually says what she wants?

detail

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. What is Amara's specific counter-proposal (in her own words)?

2. What number does Amara use to make the cost of the Monday 9am meeting concrete?

3. What does Jonas ask for that undermines his own case?

Third listen — negotiation craft

Focus on HOW each speaker frames the ask. Answer from what they DO, not what they say.

1. Amara says 'I'm most useful when...' rather than 'I need...'. What work does that swap do?

2. Jonas uses the word 'sacred'. Why is it such an expensive word choice?

3. Chichi hedges everything ('obviously if it's really needed...', 'I don't want to be difficult...'). Why does the director walk out not knowing what she wants?

Language from the audio — focus-time moves that actually work

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"I'm most useful to the team when I use Monday morning for the strategy doc." — reframes the ask from personal preference to team-value trade

"That 30-minute meeting actually costs three hours because it kills my one deep-work block." — puts a number on the interruption cost — makes it a business case

"Would you consider shifting it to Tuesday, as a 3-line async update?" — counter-offer with a specific, cheaper alternative — not just a no

"On the record for the team, not just for me." — converts a personal exception into a team norm the manager can sell upward

"My mornings are sacred." — identity language that torpedoes the case — signals ego, not data

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



"Obviously if it's really needed, of course, I don't want to be difficult..." — hedges the pushback into invisibility — the manager hears no objection

Voice A (Jonas): Honestly? No. My mornings are sacred. I don't do meetings before 11, that's just how I work. I need protected time to think, and a 9am stand-up on Monday is exactly the kind of interruption that kills my whole week. So — yeah, count me out. I'll read the notes.

Voice B (Amara): I want to push back but with a counter-proposal, not just a no. Here's the thing: Monday 9am is my only 3-hour deep-work block of the week — everything else is meetings. A 30-minute stand-up at 9am doesn't cost 30 minutes; because of context-switching, it costs the whole 3-hour block. So the real cost of this meeting isn't 30 minutes of my time, it's about 3 hours of maker output — every week. Would you consider shifting it to Tuesday, as a 3-line async update in the channel by 10am? If a live conversation is needed after everyone's read the updates, someone books a 15-minute call, not the whole team. I'd want this on the record for the team, not just for me — I'm most useful to you when I use Mondays to draft, and I know I'm not the only maker on that call.

Voice C (Chichi): Oh, um, yeah — I mean, obviously if it's really needed, of course, I don't want to be difficult. Mondays are usually pretty busy for me, but I can make it work, I think. Maybe. If everyone else is going. Um. It's fine, really, it's fine.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second focus-time negotiation

Solo task. Pick ONE recurring meeting on your calendar you'd like to change or kill. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) making the case to your manager. You MUST include: (1) 'I'm most useful when...' framing (NOT 'I need...' or 'sacred'), (2) a specific number that quantifies the cost, (3) at least ONE gerund/infinitive pair used correctly ('consider moving', 'agree to shift', 'stop attending' vs 'stop to attend'), (4) a counter-proposal with a specific alternative, (5) an ask to make the change 'on the record for the team, not just for me'.

Scene: Your real recurring meeting (recommended)

A: You make the case.

B: Imagined listener: your actual manager.

Scene: The 9am Monday stand-up

A: You make the case for moving or killing it.

B: Imagined listener: your CEO, who introduced it three months ago.

Scene: The weekly all-hands you attend but never speak in

A: You make the case for going every OTHER week and reading the recap on the off weeks.

B: Imagined listener: the Head of People, who runs the all-hands.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the counter-offer'

Now compress the whole negotiation to ONE sentence — the counter-offer. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'Instead of ____, would you consider ____? I'm most useful when ____.' Say it as if you were saying it to your manager's face on Monday morning.

Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your focus-time ask (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'I'm most useful to the team when ____'. Sentence 2: the number that quantifies the cost of the current pattern. Sentence 3: ONE counter-proposal a manager can say yes to — with a specific alternative, not just a no.

Wrap-up

One meeting on your calendar you'll counter-propose an async alternative to this week.

One gerund/infinitive pair you'll stop mixing up ('stopped to check' vs 'stopped checking').

One phrase you'll retire ('my mornings are sacred') and one you'll adopt ('I'm most useful when...').

Quiz

- 'I stopped to check email' means...
 - I quit the habit
 - I paused what I was doing in order to check email
 - I never check email
- 'I stopped checking email' means...
 - I paused for a moment
 - I quit the habit entirely
 - I still check it
- 'Please remember to send the deck' means...
 - You've sent it already
 - You haven't sent it yet — please do
 - You're not going to send it
- 'I look forward to ____ from you'. Fill the gap.
 - hear
 - hearing
 - to hear
- The best framing for a focus-time pushback is...
 - 'My mornings are sacred'
 - 'I'm most useful to the team when...' + a counter-proposal + a number
 - 'I don't want to be difficult, but...'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Focus & meeting lexis

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

Word bank: batch · no-meeting day · shift ... to · protecting the work · most useful · this could have been an email

1. I ___ my Slack and email triage into two 20-minute windows a day — otherwise it's continuous.

2. Wednesday is a team ___ - ___ — no internal calls before 3pm.

3. That's not a decline, that's a counter-offer: let me ___ that ___ 4pm — I'll be better prepared.

4. I'm not being difficult — I'm ___ so we ship the strategy doc on time.

5. Frame it as 'I'm ___ when I do writing in the morning' — the manager sells that upward.

6. Honestly? That two-hour review meeting — _____.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a proposal (120–180 words) to the leadership team advocating for a company-wide 'Deep Work' policy. Explain how this will benefit the company's output. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: batch, no-meeting day, shift ... to, protecting the work, most useful, or this could have been an email.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, executive register suitable for a boardroom proposal.

Use advanced signposting (e.g., 'In addition', 'Therefore', 'On the other hand').

Structure clearly: Problem, Proposed Solution, ROI/Benefit.

model: Subject: Proposal for a 'Deep Work' Pilot To the Leadership Team, Our current meeting culture is significantly impacting the output of our technical teams. Currently, the average engineer's day is fragmented by constant syncs, leading to high context-switching costs. I recommend we institute a company-wide no-meeting day on Wednesdays to allow for uninterrupted focus. By batching our internal administrative tasks into specific Tuesday and Thursday windows, we ensure that our makers are most useful when they have the headspace to solve complex problems. We have observed that many current standing invites are status updates where 'this could have been an email'. By shifting these to async threads and protecting the work that generates the most value, we anticipate a 15% increase in velocity. This is not about doing less, but about ensuring our highest-cost resources are deployed effectively on high-leverage tasks.

Exercise 2 — Gerund or infinitive?

Put the verb in brackets in the correct form.

1. I decided ____ (decline) the Friday sync — nothing was going to happen in it.

2. Would you consider ____ (move) our 1:1 to Tuesday afternoon?

3. Please remember ____ (send) the pre-read 24 hours before the meeting.

4. I remember ____ (send) it — I have the email in my sent folder from 4pm.

5. I'm interested in ____ (protect) Wednesday mornings for team-wide deep work.

6. She refused ____ (cancel) the stand-up, even though nobody had anything to say.

7. I look forward to ____ (hear) how the pilot goes.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



8. Try ____ (batch) your email into two 20-minute windows — see if it changes your afternoons.
-

Exercise 3 — Same verb, different meaning

Choose the correct form (gerund or infinitive) for the meaning in brackets.

1. I stopped (to check / checking) email at 6am. (...I quit that habit)
(A) to check
(B) checking
2. I stopped (to check / checking) email at 6am. (...I paused what I was doing to look at email)
(A) to check
(B) checking
3. Please remember (to cancel / cancelling) tomorrow's meeting. (...it isn't cancelled yet)
(A) to cancel
(B) cancelling
4. I'll never forget (to cancel / cancelling) that meeting — it saved us six hours a week. (...I already did it)
(A) to cancel
(B) cancelling
5. I tried (to protect / protecting) Wednesday morning. (...I made the attempt — it may have failed)
(A) to protect
(B) protecting
6. Try (to block / blocking) Wednesdays — it might work. (...experiment with this technique)
(A) to block
(B) blocking

Exercise 4 — Rewrite as a focus-time negotiation

Rewrite each blunt statement into a sentence a manager can say yes to — with the correct gerund/infinitive.

1. 'I don't want to come to your Monday meeting.'
-

2. 'Stop scheduling stuff on Wednesday mornings.'
-

3. 'I forgot to reply to your Slack.'
-

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. 'I hate all these meetings.'

Exercise 5 — Three people defend their focus time

You'll hear three people push back on a new company-wide Monday 9am stand-up. Decide whose case the director should take to the CEO.

1. Which speaker wins the case?

2. Which speaker sounds precious and loses the room?

3. Which speaker never actually says what she wants?

Voice A (Jonas): My mornings are sacred. I don't do meetings before 11 — that's just how I work. A 9am stand-up on Monday is exactly the kind of interruption that kills my whole week. Count me out. I'll read the notes.

Voice B (Amara): Here's the thing: Monday 9am is my only 3-hour deep-work block of the week. A 30-minute stand-up at 9am doesn't cost 30 minutes; because of context-switching, it costs the whole 3-hour block. Would you consider shifting it to Tuesday, as a 3-line async update by 10am? If a live conversation is needed after everyone's read the updates, someone books a 15-minute call — not the whole team. I'd want this on the record for the team, not just for me. I'm most useful to you when I use Mondays to draft.

Voice C (Chichi): Oh, um, yeah — I mean, obviously if it's really needed, of course, I don't want to be difficult. Mondays are usually pretty busy, but I can make it work, I think. Maybe. If everyone else is going. Um. It's fine, really, it's fine.

Exercise 6 — Write your focus-time ask

Pick one real recurring meeting on your calendar you'd like to change or kill. Write the 3-sentence ask (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'I'm most useful to the team when ____'. Sentence 2: the number that quantifies the cost. Sentence 3: ONE counter-proposal a manager can say yes to.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Meridian Labs

Think about Meridian Labs (140 people, 27 hrs/week of meetings for the average IC, 2 senior engineers threatening to leave). Answer the questions.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. You're the new COO. Draft the ONE opening sentence of your first all-hands. You cannot start with 'let's all be more mindful'.

2. You can ship 3 of 4 policy levers on Monday: (a) no-meeting Wednesdays, (b) shrink defaults 30→20 / 60→45, (c) required pre-read + named decision-maker for meetings >30min, (d) convert standing meetings to async. Pick 3 and justify.

3. The two senior engineers threatening to leave: what do you do in 5 working days?

4. Write the ONE-line meeting rule you'd pin to every new invite.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: maker or manager?

1. MAKER — single-threaded, cognitively expensive.
2. MANAGER — coordination, relationship.
3. MAKER — one notification wrecks the model.
4. MANAGER — high-value coordination.

Reading: Maker time, manager time, and why they don't share a calendar

1. (B) The two schedules cost interruptions differently — a 30-min meeting doesn't hurt a manager but can kill a maker's afternoon
2. (B) I paused what I was doing IN ORDER TO check email
3. (B) I quit the habit — no more email checking
4. (B) Sounds precious and loses the room

Vocabulary: focus, productivity, meetings vs maker time

1. batch
2. no-meeting day
3. shift ... to
4. protecting the work
5. most useful
6. this could have been an email
1. I batch Slack and email triage into one window — otherwise it's continuous.
2. Wednesday is a team no-meeting day — no internal calls before 3pm.
3. That's not a decline, that's a counter-offer: let me shift that to 4pm — I'll be better prepared.
4. I'm not being difficult — I'm protecting the work so we ship the strategy doc on time.
5. Honestly? That two-hour review meeting — this could have been an email.

Grammar focus: Gerunds and infinitives

1. to decline
2. moving
3. to send
4. sending
5. protecting
6. to cancel
7. hearing
8. batching
1. checking
2. to check
3. to cancel
4. cancelling
5. to protect
6. blocking
1. Model: 'Would you consider MOVING that Monday meeting to Thursday? I'm most useful to you when I use Mondays to draft — I'll come back with a proper written recommendation instead of half-formed thoughts.'
2. Model: 'I'd like to PROTECT Wednesday mornings for the team's deep work. It's on the record for everyone, not just me — I'm hoping we all agree to STOP BOOKING internal meetings before noon on Wednesdays.'
3. Model: 'Sorry — I saw your Slack and I remember READING it, but I forgot TO REPLY. I BATCH Slack twice a day, so if it's urgent, ping me on my phone directly.'
4. Model: 'I've been trying TO AUDIT my calendar. About 60% of my meetings could be async updates instead. Would you MIND me proposing a small experiment — no internal meetings before noon for two weeks — and we measure whether anything actually broke?'

Listening: three people defend their focus time

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Voice B (Amara). Frames the pushback as team value ('I'm most useful when...'), offers a counter-proposal ('shift to Tuesday async update'), quantifies the cost ('kills my only 3-hour maker block'), and gets the gerund/infinitive right without sounding preachy.
2. Voice A (Jonas) — 'my mornings are sacred / I don't do meetings before 11 / I need protected time' — no counter-offer, no framing as team value, and 'sacred' is the word that torpedoed the case.
3. Voice C (Chichi) — agrees to everything, hedges with 'obviously if it's really needed', and the director walks out unsure whether Chichi is objecting at all. Politeness without a clear ask = no ask.
1. 'Move the stand-up to Tuesday async — a written 3-line update in the channel by 10am — and if a live conversation is needed after reading the updates, someone books a 15-minute call, not the whole team.' Specific, tested elsewhere, cheaper than the status quo.
2. Monday 9am is her only 3-hour deep-work block of the week. A 30-minute meeting at 9am destroys the whole block because of context-switching cost — so a '30-minute meeting' actually costs 3 hours of maker output.
3. He asks for a permanent, personal exception ('I don't do meetings before 11'). Personal exceptions can't be defended in front of a CEO; team norms can. He should have asked for the norm change, not the personal opt-out.
1. It re-frames the request from 'personal preference' to 'team-value calculation'. The manager can say yes without feeling they've caved to a diva — they can go back to THEIR boss and say 'Amara ships more code this way'. 'I need' asks for a favour; 'I'm most useful' offers a trade.
2. 'Sacred' signals identity and inflexibility. It tells the room 'this is not up for discussion', which almost always makes it more up for discussion. The same request framed as 'my only 3-hour maker block' is data; framed as 'sacred', it's ego.
3. Because Chichi never actually said no, never named a cost, and never proposed an alternative. The three moves that make a pushback readable — say what you want, name the cost, offer a counter — she used none of. Politeness without a clear ask reads to a busy manager as 'no real objection'.

Quiz

1. (B) I paused what I was doing in order to check email
2. (B) I quit the habit entirely
3. (B) You haven't sent it yet — please do
4. (B) hearing
5. (B) 'I'm most useful to the team when...' + a counter-proposal + a number

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Focus & meeting lexis

1. batch
2. no-meeting day
3. shift ... to
4. protecting the work
5. most useful
6. this could have been an email

Exercise 2 — Gerund or infinitive?

1. to decline
2. moving
3. to send
4. sending
5. protecting
6. to cancel
7. hearing
8. batching

Exercise 3 — Same verb, different meaning

1. (B) checking
2. (A) to check
3. (A) to cancel
4. (B) cancelling
5. (A) to protect
6. (B) blocking

Exercise 4 — Rewrite as a focus-time negotiation

1. Model: 'Would you consider MOVING that Monday meeting to Thursday? I'm most useful when I use Mondays to draft — I'll come back with a proper written recommendation.'
2. Model: 'I'd like to protect Wednesday mornings for the team's deep work — on the record for everyone, not just me. Would we agree to STOP BOOKING internal meetings before noon on Wednesdays?'
3. Model: 'Sorry — I remember READING it, but I forgot TO REPLY. I batch Slack twice a day, so if it's urgent, ping me on my phone directly.'
4. Model: 'About 60% of my meetings could be async updates instead. Would you MIND me proposing a two-week experiment — no internal meetings before noon — and we measure whether anything actually broke?'

Exercise 5 — Three people defend their focus time

1. Voice B (Amara) — frames as team value ('I'm most useful when...'), quantifies the cost ('3 hours of maker output lost'), offers a specific counter-proposal (Tuesday 3-line async), asks 'on the record for the team'.
2. Voice A (Jonas) — 'my mornings are sacred / I don't do meetings before 11' — identity language, personal exception, no counter-offer.
3. Voice C (Chichi) — hedges everything ('obviously if it's really needed...'), no ask, no counter, no number. Politeness without a clear ask = no ask.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Meridian Labs

1. Model: 'I'm most useful to Meridian when I make it easier for you to do the work only you can do — and right now, an average IC has 27 hours of meetings a week and 13 hours to actually build anything, which means the calendar is broken.'
2. Model: (a) + (b) + (c). No-meeting Wednesday is the visible signal that this is real; shrinking defaults gives back 12 hrs/week per person with no coordination cost; the pre-read rule kills the 41% of meetings with no clear owner. Skip (d) for now — highest long-term value but too coordination-heavy to ship in week one.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Model: 1:1 with each in 48 hours; ask them to name ONE meeting each that would give them their afternoon back; kill or shrink that meeting within 5 days and credit them publicly; screenshot the resulting maker time on their calendar the following Monday. Attrition risks fix on specific named wins, not policy.
4. Model: 'No meeting over 30 minutes goes on a calendar without a written pre-read, a named decision-maker, and a required-vs-optional attendee list. Missing any of those → the meeting can be declined without explanation.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
