



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

Business English

Complete course book

20 units · Class Book + Workbook · Answer keys



Unit 1 · B1A

Networking that works

Theme: First Contact



Learning objectives

- Introduce yourself and your role clearly in under 30 seconds.
- Ask direct and indirect questions to keep a conversation going.
- Use small-talk topics that work across corporate, tech and freelance settings.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Agree or disagree

Read each statement. Vote A / D / ID and defend your choice in one sentence.

"Networking events are a waste of time for anyone under 30."

"The best professional contacts are made by accident, not on purpose."

"If you have to introduce yourself, you've already lost the room."

"LinkedIn has replaced business cards — for better AND for worse."

Lead-in: types of networker

Match each behaviour to the label.

1. Hands out cards to everyone

2. Asks questions and remembers names

3. Talks only to people they already know

followUp: Which one are you closest to today?

Reading: The 90-second rule

Recruiters, investors and prospective clients all report the same thing: they form a strong opinion of a professional within about 90 seconds of meeting them. This is not fair, but it is useful information. Those 90 seconds are almost always driven by three things — how you introduce your role, the first question you ask, and how you listen to the answer.

The most common mistake is to over-explain what you do. "I'm a senior product manager at a Series-B fintech focused on cross-border B2B payments" is accurate, but it lands as noise. "I help small companies move money between countries without paying huge fees" opens a conversation. The second sentence uses plain verbs and a real problem; the first uses labels only insiders understand.

The most useful habit, though, is not about you. Great networkers ask one specific question, then follow up on the answer instead of jumping to their next pre-planned line. "What are you working on this quarter?" beats "What do you do?" every time, because it invites a story rather than a title.

1. How quickly do people form a first professional impression?

(A) About 5 minutes

(B) About 90 seconds

(C) After a follow-up email

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2. What's the main problem with the "senior product manager at a Series-B fintech" line?
 - (A) It's too short
 - (B) It uses only insider labels, not a real problem
 - (C) It's grammatically wrong
3. What do great networkers do differently?
 - (A) They talk faster
 - (B) They ask a specific question and follow up on the answer
 - (C) They avoid asking questions
4. The phrase "lands as noise" in paragraph 2 means...
 - (A) is heard but not understood or remembered
 - (B) is offensive
 - (C) is spoken too loudly

Vocabulary in context

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

prospective — possible future (client, employer, partner)

over-explain — give more detail than the listener needs

insider — someone inside a group who knows its jargon

follow up — return to something to continue or check it

pre-planned — decided in advance

invite a story — ask in a way that gets a real, longer answer

Vocabulary: job roles, industries & small talk

individual contributor — works on the work — no direct reports

people manager — responsible for a team of direct reports

founder — started the company; often wears many hats

independent consultant — self-employed, sells expertise engagement by engagement

subject-matter expert — brought in from outside to advise on a specific problem

key stakeholder — anyone with real influence over, or exposure to, the outcome

industry gathering — large sector event with talks & networking

kick off — start (a project, a quarter, a call)

cash runway — how many months of capital a startup has left

quarter (Q1–Q4) — three-month reporting period

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commute — your daily journey to the office

remote / hybrid / on-site — the three most common working arrangements

practice

Complete the sentences with *ONE* word or phrase from the lists.

1. She's not a manager yet — she's still an ____.

2. We're about to ____ a big rebrand project next Monday.

3. The main ____ on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.

4. How was your ____ this morning — did the metro cooperate?

5. The startup has about nine months of ____ before they need to raise again.

6. We brought in an outside ____ to help us re-price the product.

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. She's not a manager yet — she's still an employee who works on the work with no direct reports.

2. We're about to start a big rebrand project next Monday.

3. The main people with influence over the outcome on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.

4. How was your daily journey to the office this morning — did the metro cooperate?

5. The startup has about nine months of capital left before they run out before they need to raise again.

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Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short follow-up memo to your manager summarizing the key connections made at an industry gathering and how you plan to follow up.

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: Q3 Industry Gathering — Networking Summary. The event was a productive use of time; I managed to connect with several key stakeholders from the APAC region who are currently facing similar onboarding frictions. Specifically, I met a founder from a Series-B fintech who is struggling with their cash runway and looking for the kind of subject-matter expert advice we provide. My plain-language introduction seemed to land well, avoiding the usual jargon that often lands as noise in these rooms. I also spoke with an independent consultant who has worked with our main competitor; she provided some useful insights into their current remote-first strategy. I plan to follow up with both by Friday to suggest a brief introductory call. This quarter, my goal is to turn these initial 'coffee-break' chats into formal leads before we kick off the next project phase.



Grammar focus: Question formation for networking

1. Direct questions — Standard word order: (Question word) + auxiliary + subject + verb. • Where do you work? • What are you working on this quarter?

2. Indirect questions — **softer, more professional** — After polite openers, use statement word order and NO do/does/did: • Where's the coffee? → Could you tell me where the coffee is? • What does she do? → Do you mind if I ask what she does?

3. Follow-up questions that keep the conversation alive — Great networkers rarely change the topic. They use short prompts: • Oh really? How come? • What made you decide to do that? • That's interesting — could you say a bit more about that?

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Exercise A — Make it indirect

Rewrite each direct question as an indirect / softer version.

1. What do you do?

2. Where is the breakout room?

3. How did you get into product management?

4. Is your company hiring right now?

5. What are the main challenges in your role?

Exercise B — Fix the mistake

Each question has ONE mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. Could you tell me where is the registration desk?

2. Who did told you about this conference?

3. Do you know what time does the keynote start?

4. I was wondering how long you working there?

Exercise C — Follow-up chain

Write ONE follow-up question that keeps each mini-conversation alive (any indirect / short prompt is fine).

1. "I'm actually a freelance data consultant." →

2. "We're launching in the LATAM market this quarter." →

3. "My biggest headache right now is hiring." →

4. "I've just switched teams internally." →

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Listening: Two strangers at a conference coffee break

Two professionals are queuing for coffee at an industry conference.

pre

What do you think the first question will be?

Do you think they'll exchange contact details?

gist

1. How does the freelancer describe what he does — in insider terms or plain language?

2. What is the designer working on this quarter?

3. Do they agree to stay in touch?

detail

1. Why did he leave his last full-time job?

2. What surprises her about freelancing, according to him?

3. What specific follow-up does he offer?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED, not directly stated.

1. Who is more comfortable at this conference — Voice A or Voice B? How do you know?

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2. Which of them is more likely to follow up first, and why?

3. What does Voice B's phrase 'Loved the team, hated the projects' tell you about how he makes career choices?

Language from the audio — match the phrase

Find these six phrases in the transcript and match them to what they DO in a conversation.

"Long queue." — opener — uses a shared situation instead of a question

"Honestly?" — signals a real, unpolished answer is coming

"That's interesting." — keeps the ball in the other person's court

"What about you, what are you working on this quarter?" — specific follow-up — invites a story, not a title

"Mind if I send it over?" — soft, indirect request for permission to follow up

"I'll accept the request." — closes the loop on a next step in one line

Voice A: Long queue. Is this your first time at this conference?

Voice B: Third, actually. You?

Voice A: First. I'm still figuring out which sessions are worth it. What do you do?

Voice B: Honestly? I help companies figure out what their data is actually telling them. On paper I'm a freelance data consultant, but that phrase means nothing to most people.

Voice A: Ha, fair. And how did you end up doing that?

Voice B: I was in-house at a big bank for years. Loved the team, hated the projects. Freelancing gives me more control over which problems I take on.

Voice A: That's interesting. Is it as scary as people say?

Voice B: The scary part isn't the money — it's how much of your time goes into sales instead of the actual work. What about you, what are you working on this quarter?

Voice A: A big redesign of our customer onboarding flow. First-week drop-off is our biggest problem.

Voice B: Oh, I could talk about onboarding metrics all day. I actually wrote a short piece on that recently — mind if I send it over?

Voice A: Please. LinkedIn easier than email?

Voice B: Perfect. I'll accept the request.

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Speaking: role-play — 90 seconds each

Choose *ONE* situation. Introduce yourself in 90 seconds using plain language. Then take turns asking at least three indirect / follow-up questions.

Scene: At a conference coffee break

A: You're at the event for the first time, hoping to find a new job.

B: You're a repeat attendee, currently hiring.

Scene: Before a Zoom kick-off call

A: You're a new consultant joining the client's team.

B: You're the client's project lead, five minutes early.

Scene: At a co-working space kitchen

A: You're a freelancer between contracts.

B: You work at a fast-growing startup nearby.

Writing mini-task

Write a 60–80 word LinkedIn follow-up message to someone you met at an event. Reference something specific they said, use *ONE* indirect question, and suggest a next step.

Wrap-up

One phrase from today you'll use next time you introduce yourself.

One follow-up question you want to remember.

One thing about the case study you'd copy for your own team.

Quiz

1. The most professional way to ask 'What do you do?' is...
 - (A) "What do you do?"
 - (B) "Do you mind if I ask what you do?"
 - (C) "Say your job."
2. Which describes an individual contributor?
 - (A) A team lead with 5 reports
 - (B) Someone who does the work with no direct reports
 - (C) The founder

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3. Choose the correct indirect question.
- (A) Could you tell me where is the room?
 - (B) Could you tell me where the room is?
 - (C) Could you tell me where does the room?
4. "Runway" in a startup context means...
- (A) The airport strip
 - (B) How many months of cash you have left
 - (C) The route to the office
5. Which is the BEST opening question at a networking event?
- (A) What do you do?
 - (B) What are you working on this quarter?
 - (C) How much do you earn?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

Word bank: personable · eloquent · circumspect · proactive · polished · hands-on

1. She's very ____ — she already drafted a plan before anyone asked.

2. Extremely ____ speaker: she explained a complex product in two sentences.

3. He's a ____ leader — he does the work himself, not just delegates.

4. Great slide deck. Very ____, maybe a little too corporate for our team.

5. Try to seem ____ on your first day — smile, ask questions, sit at the shared table.

6. He was quite ____ in the big meeting but much warmer over coffee.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word internal memo to your department regarding a new project lead joining the team. You need to explain why this person was chosen, focusing on their 'proactive' and 'hands-on' approach, while addressing any 'circumspect' initial feedback from the team. Use at least 4 items from the unit's vocabulary.

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id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items.

Maintain a formal, executive register.

Organize with clear paragraph breaks.

Ensure logical flow from introduction to call-to-action.

model: To: Marketing Department From: Sarah Jenkins, Head of Growth Subject: Welcome: New Project Lead for Project Zenith I am delighted to announce that Marcus Thorne will be joining us as Project Lead for Zenith. Marcus stood out during the selection process for his remarkably proactive attitude; he has already submitted a preliminary audit of our current workflows. He is known for being a hands-on leader who prefers direct involvement in execution over high-level delegation. I am aware that some of you have been circumspect regarding his arrival, particularly given his reputation for being very polished and corporate. However, I have found him to be extremely personable and genuinely interested in our team culture. His eloquent presentation of the roadmap convinced the board that he is the right fit. I expect his presence to streamline our delivery significantly. Please join me in welcoming Marcus during our Monday stand-up, where he will share his initial impressions and vision for the project.

2. Present simple or continuous?

Put the verb in brackets in the correct present form.

1. I ____ (work) for a design agency in Berlin.

2. This month we ____ (redesign) the onboarding flow.

3. The CFO ____ (fly) in on the 14th — it's already booked.

4. She usually ____ (chair) the Monday stand-up.

5. We ____ (not / know) the final budget yet.

6. Sorry — I can't chat. I ____ (finish) a client deck for tomorrow.

7. Our team ____ (own) the whole customer journey, not just onboarding.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Routine, project or plan?

Choose the correct label for each sentence.

1. We ship a new release every second Thursday.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
2. I'm running a pilot with three key customers this month.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
3. We're moving to a four-day week from January.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
4. She always answers Slack within 15 minutes.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan
5. I'm flying to Warsaw on Monday.
(A) Routine
(B) Current project
(C) Fixed future plan

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake with present simple or continuous. Rewrite it.

1. I am working for a bank in Madrid — I've been there five years.

2. This week I lead the design review while my manager is on holiday.

3. We are owning the customer relationship from day one.

4. I meet him tomorrow at 3pm — it's confirmed.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. Listening — three first-day observations

Three colleagues describe their first impression of a new team member, Léa. Notice which adjectives they use and whether they mix simple and continuous correctly.

1. Which speaker gives the most EVIDENCE-BASED first impression?

2. Which speaker mixes up present simple and continuous?

3. Which speaker gives a fair 'second-chance' comment?

Voice A: She seemed a bit circumspect on day one, but she's shadowing the team all week, so let's see her in a smaller room before we decide anything.

Voice B: Very eloquent. She summarised the whole discovery deck in about three sentences — I've never seen someone do that on day one.

Voice C: She is knowing the product already. She's asking the right questions. I'm liking her a lot.

6. Writing — a first-impression note

Write a 60–80 word 'first-impression note' about a new colleague (real or invented). Use: (a) at least TWO adjectives from the lesson, (b) ONE sentence in present simple (routine or fact), (c) ONE sentence in present continuous (current project or fixed plan).

7. Case study reflection

Go back to the Bright Lights case (Aditi Rao). Answer briefly, in your own words.

1. In one sentence, what was the FAIREST first impression of Aditi and why?

2. Name ONE concrete first-week activity you'd add to help the team see her properly, and explain why.

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Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: types of networker

1. the hunter
2. the connector
3. the wallflower

Reading: The 90-second rule

1. (B) About 90 seconds
2. (B) It uses only insider labels, not a real problem
3. (B) They ask a specific question and follow up on the answer
4. (A) is heard but not understood or remembered

Vocabulary: job roles, industries & small talk

1. individual contributor
2. kick off
3. key stakeholders
4. commute
5. cash runway
6. subject-matter expert
1. She's not a manager yet — she's still an individual contributor.
2. We're about to kick off a big rebrand project next Monday.
3. The main key stakeholders on this project are Legal, Sales and the CEO.
4. How was your commute this morning — did the metro cooperate?
5. The startup has about nine months of cash runway before they need to raise again.

Grammar focus: Question formation for networking

1. Do you mind if I ask what you do?
2. Could you tell me where the breakout room is?
3. I'd love to know how you got into product management.
4. Do you know whether your company is hiring right now?
5. Could I ask what the main challenges in your role are?
1. Could you tell me where the registration desk is?
2. Who told you about this conference?
3. Do you know what time the keynote starts?
4. I was wondering how long you've been working there.
1. Model: "Oh really? What made you decide to go freelance?"
2. Model: "That's interesting — could you say a bit more about how you chose LATAM first?"
3. Model: "I'd love to know what you've tried so far."
4. Model: "How come? What are you working on now?"

Listening: Two strangers at a conference coffee break

1. Plain language: he helps companies figure out what their data is actually telling them.
2. A big redesign of their customer onboarding flow.
3. Yes — they swap LinkedIn instead of business cards.
1. He wanted more control over the kinds of problems he worked on.
2. The amount of time spent on sales, not on the actual work.
3. To send her a short article he wrote on onboarding metrics.
1. Voice B — she says it's her third time and offers the plain-language self-description with confidence, while Voice A admits it's her first and is still figuring out sessions.
2. Voice B — he offers a specific next step (send the article) and volunteers a channel (LinkedIn). Follow-through is on him.
3. He weighs the type of problem more than salary or brand — a values-driven mover, not a status-driven one.

Quiz

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1. (B) "Do you mind if I ask what you do?"
2. (B) Someone who does the work with no direct reports
3. (B) Could you tell me where the room is?
4. (B) How many months of cash you have left
5. (B) What are you working on this quarter?

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Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. proactive
2. eloquent
3. hands-on
4. polished
5. personable
6. circumspect

2. Present simple or continuous?

1. work
2. are redesigning
3. is flying
4. chairs
5. don't know
6. am finishing
7. owns

3. Routine, project or plan?

1. (A) Routine
2. (B) Current project
3. (C) Fixed future plan
4. (A) Routine
5. (C) Fixed future plan

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. I work for a bank in Madrid — I've been there five years.
2. This week I'm leading the design review while my manager is on holiday.
3. We own the customer relationship from day one.
4. I'm meeting him tomorrow at 3pm — it's confirmed.

5. Listening — three first-day observations

1. Speaker 2 — she cites a specific behaviour (Léa summarised a discovery deck in three sentences).
2. Speaker 3 — 'She is knowing the product already' should be 'She already knows the product'.
3. Speaker 1 — 'She seemed a bit circumspect on day one, but she's shadowing the team all week, so let's see her in a smaller room.'

7. Case study reflection

1. Model: sharp and prepared, because it's supported by observed behaviour (the client call), while 'distant' is only based on two short coffees.
2. Model example: a low-stakes lunch with no work agenda, so the team sees her outside the pressure of a client call.

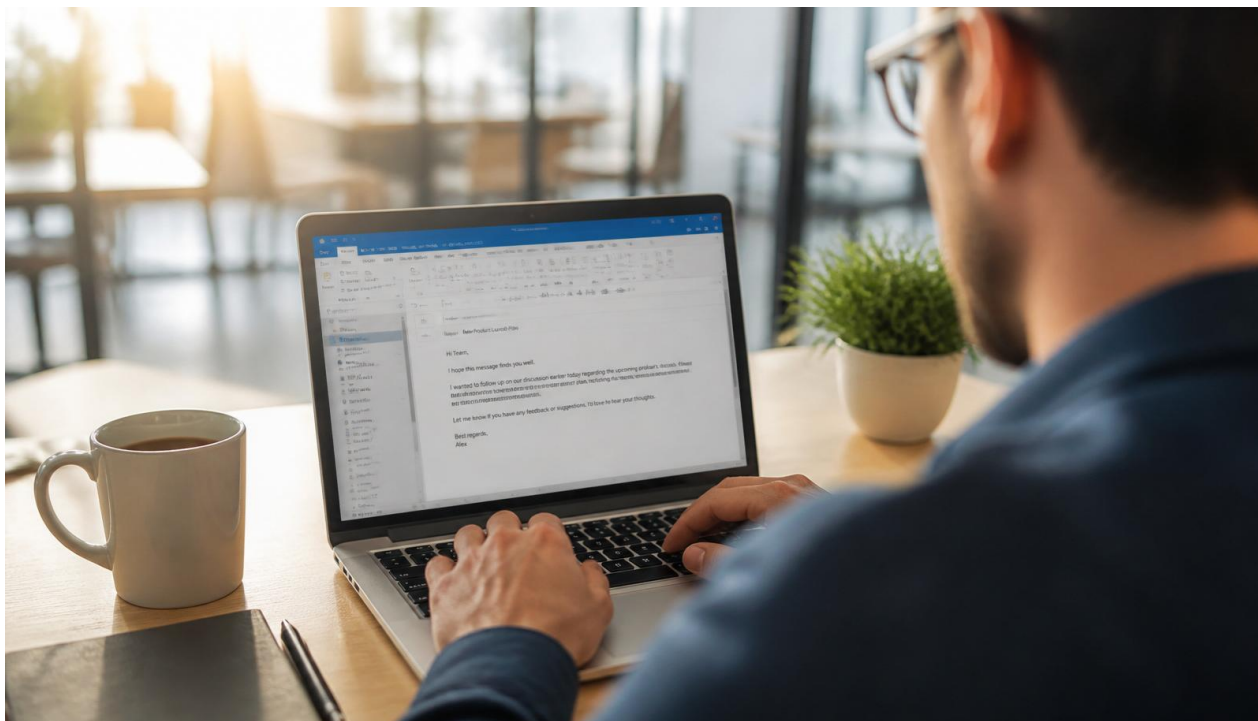
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Unit 1 · B1B

Emails that get replies

Theme: First Contact



Learning objectives

- Match email register (formal / neutral / friendly) to the reader and situation.
- Use modal verbs to make requests that feel polite but not weak.
- Write a subject line and opening that actually gets opened.

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Class Book

Warm-up · Quick poll

Vote on each question (raise hand / thumbs). Then defend your vote in ONE sentence.

Inbox zero — realistic goal or corporate myth?

"Reply all" — how often is it actually the right choice?

Emojis in professional email — never / sometimes / always?

Which is worse: the too-long email, or the too-short 'ok'?

Lead-in: subject lines

Rank 1 (open first) → 3 (delete).

1. "Quick question about Q4 forecast"

2. "Following up"

3. "URGENT!!! Please read ASAP!!!"

followUp: What makes the winner work?

Reading: The three registers of professional email

Most professional writing courses talk about 'formal' and 'informal' emails, as if there were only two choices. In practice, there are three: formal, neutral and friendly, and the difference between them is the difference between an email that gets read and one that gets ignored.

A formal email is for regulators, lawyers, senior leaders you have never met, and complaints. It uses full names, no contractions, and phrases like "I am writing to enquire...". It is slow and safe. A friendly email is for colleagues you speak to daily, and it happily uses first names, emojis and "Hey". Between these two lives the neutral register — the workhorse of modern business. It uses first names, allows contractions, and prefers short verbs (help, ask, send) over long ones (facilitate, enquire, forward).

The single biggest mistake B2-level writers make is to default to formal for everything, because it feels 'safer'. It isn't. To a busy colleague, a message that starts "Dear Ms. Rivera, I hope this email finds you well..." reads as slow, distant, and slightly odd. The neutral version — "Hi María, hope you're doing well. Quick question about..." — is faster to read, easier to reply to, and, crucially, still polite.

1. How many registers does the writer identify?

(A) Two: formal / informal

(B) Three: formal / neutral / friendly

(C) Four

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2. The neutral register is described as...
 - (A) Rude
 - (B) The workhorse of modern business
 - (C) The same as formal
3. According to the writer, defaulting to formal is...
 - (A) Always the safest choice
 - (B) A common mistake because it reads as slow and distant
 - (C) Only appropriate in emojis
4. "Quick question about..." in the last paragraph is offered as an example of...
 - (A) Formal register
 - (B) Neutral register that is still polite
 - (C) Friendly register with emojis

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

register — level of formality in language

workhorse — the reliable, everyday version

default to — automatically choose without thinking

contraction — shortened form like I'm, don't, we've

regulator — official body that enforces rules in an industry

distant — cold, keeping the reader at arm's length

Vocabulary: email register

Dear Mr / Ms Rivera, — opener for regulators, legal counsel, senior stakeholders you've never met

I am writing to enquire... — very formal opening line

Kind regards, / Yours sincerely, — safe formal closings

Please find the attached documentation... — old but still safe for external formal correspondence

Hi María, — the default modern opener

Quick query regarding... — signals a short, specific ask

Could you... / Would you mind... — polite requests

Thanks, / Best, — everyday closings

Hey María, — for close colleagues you liaise with daily

Just a heads-up... — casual advance warning

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Cheers, — casual, common in UK/Aus workplaces

No rush at all ■ — friendly sign-off softening a request

practice

Complete each opening with the phrase that fits the register in brackets.

1. ____ María, quick query regarding the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today? (neutral)

2. ____ Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire about the terms of the contract. (formal)

3. ____ María ■ just a heads-up that I'll be out of office tomorrow. (friendly)

4. Could you please ____ the deck across by end of day? (neutral verb)

5. ____ regards, — safe formal closing at the end of an email. (formal closing)

6. Thanks so much for the swift turnaround — really appreciate it. ____ (friendly closing, UK-style)

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. Hi María, <u>short question about</u> the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today?

2. <u>I am writing to ask</u> about the terms of the contract.

3. Hey María ■ <u>just a bit of advance warning</u> that I'll be out of office tomorrow.

4. Could you please <u>transmit</u> the deck across by end of day?

5. <u>Safe formal closing</u> — safe formal closing at the end of an email.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write an email to your team proposing a shift from formal to neutral register for internal comms to increase efficiency.

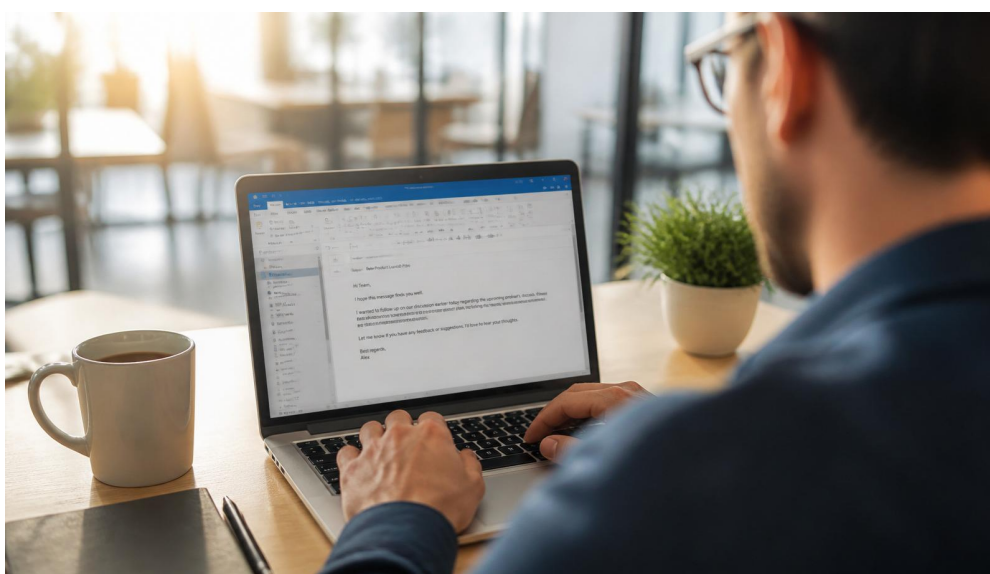
Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

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 — Shifting our internal email register. As we scale, I've noticed a tendency to default to a very formal register for internal requests, which often feels distant and slows down our response times. To keep our pace high, I suggest we adopt the neutral register as our team workhorse for everyday queries. This means using first names, contractions, and shorter verbs like 'help' or 'send' instead of 'facilitate' or 'forward'. Of course, we should still use a formal tone when emailing a regulator or senior stakeholders we haven't met, but for internal collaboration, a 'Hi' and a 'Quick query' are perfectly professional. This shift will ensure our messages don't read as slightly odd or cold to busy colleagues. Please flag any concerns before our Friday sync; I'd like to get this on record as our new team norm.



Grammar focus: Modals for polite requests

1. Could / Would you... — the workhorses — The safest neutral requests use could / would: • Could you send me the deck by 3pm? • Would you be able to review this before Friday? Both are polite without sounding weak.

2. Would you mind + -ing — extra soft — Use when the ask is bigger, or the person is senior / busy: • Would you mind taking a quick look at slide 7? • Would you mind if I moved our call to Thursday?

3. Might / May — formal, distant — Reserved for formal emails to people you don't know: • Might I suggest a slight change to the agenda? • May I ask for your feedback by Monday? Don't use these with your everyday teammate — they'll sound odd.

Exercise A — Rewrite the request

Rewrite each blunt request in a neutral, polite form.

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1. Send me the deck by 3pm.

2. Review this before Friday.

3. Take a quick look at slide 7.

4. Move our call to Thursday.

5. Reply by Monday.

Exercise B — Choose the right register

Read each situation. Pick the phrase that fits best.

1. Emailing the CFO you've never met, about a compliance question.

2. Emailing a teammate you Slack every day, about lunch plans.

3. Emailing a colleague from another team you know a little.

4. Following up on an invoice that's 30 days late.

Exercise C — Find and fix

Each email opener has ONE problem. Rewrite it.

1. Hey Ms Rivera ■ I am writing to enquire about the compliance report.

2. Please send me the deck.

3. Would you mind to review this before Friday?

Listening: Voicemail from a client

Alex has just missed a call from Nadia, a client. Nadia's voicemail is followed by a short reply call from Alex.

pre

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How do you think Nadia will describe the problem?

What tone do you expect from a client leaving a voicemail — formal, neutral or friendly?

gist

1. What is Nadia's main request?

2. How urgent is it?

3. What does Alex offer in the reply call?

detail

1. What has changed since the last proposal?

2. What does Alex ask Nadia to confirm?

3. How does the call end?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. How would you describe Nadia's tone — friendly, neutral or formal — and what evidence supports it?

2. Why does Alex propose a DRAFT on Tuesday before the final on Wednesday?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. What does Alex's line 'I'll follow up in writing straight after this call' tell you about how he manages risk?

Language from the audio — what does it DO?

Find each phrase in the transcript and match it to its function.

"Quick one —" — signals the request will be short and specific

"if possible" — softens a firm deadline without weakening it

"Would it work if I sent a draft...?" — polite modal request that protects the sender's timeline

"One quick question —" — opens a second ask without derailing the first

"flag it in the draft" — invites early warning instead of a late surprise

"so we've got it on record" — moves an agreement from spoken to written for accountability

Voice A (voicemail): Hi Alex, Nadia here. Quick one — I'll need the updated proposal by Wednesday morning if possible. Our board meets in the afternoon and I'd love to walk them through it. One important change: the scope is bigger now — we want to include LATAM. Give me a call back when you can. Thanks.

Voice B: Hi Nadia, thanks for the voicemail. So — updated proposal, LATAM included, in your inbox by Wednesday morning. Would it work if I sent a draft by Tuesday evening, so you have time to react before the final version at 9am Wednesday?

Voice A: That would be perfect, actually.

Voice B: Great. One quick question — are we still working with the same 12-month timeline, or does the bigger scope push that out?

Voice A: Same timeline for now. If that turns out to be unrealistic, flag it in the draft and we'll talk.

Voice B: Understood. I'll follow up in writing straight after this call so we've got it on record. Thanks Nadia — talk Tuesday.

Speaking: role-play — turn an email into a call

Choose ONE situation. One of you plays the sender, one plays the receiver, on a short phone call. Use at least TWO polite modal requests.

Scene: Late invoice

A: You're a freelancer whose invoice is 30 days overdue.

B: You're the client's accounts contact, apologetic but busy.

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**Scene:** Slipping deadline

A: You're the vendor. You need one more week on a deliverable.

B: You're the customer. The launch date is fixed.

Scene: Meeting reschedule

A: You need to move a client meeting from Thursday to Monday.

B: You're the client — Monday is genuinely difficult.

Writing mini-task

Write *TWO* versions of the *SAME* email (60–80 words each): one *FORMAL* to a regulator, one *NEUTRAL* to a colleague. The topic: you need the Q3 report by end of week.

Wrap-up

One phrase from today you'll steal for your next email.

One register mistake you'll try to stop making.

One polite modal you'll use more often.

Quiz

1. Which register uses 'Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire...'?
(A) Friendly
(B) Neutral
(C) Formal
2. Which is the **SOFTTEST** way to ask someone senior for a favour?
(A) Send the deck.
(B) Could you send the deck?
(C) Would you mind sending the deck?
3. 'Would you mind ____ the report?' — pick the correct form.
(A) review
(B) to review
(C) reviewing

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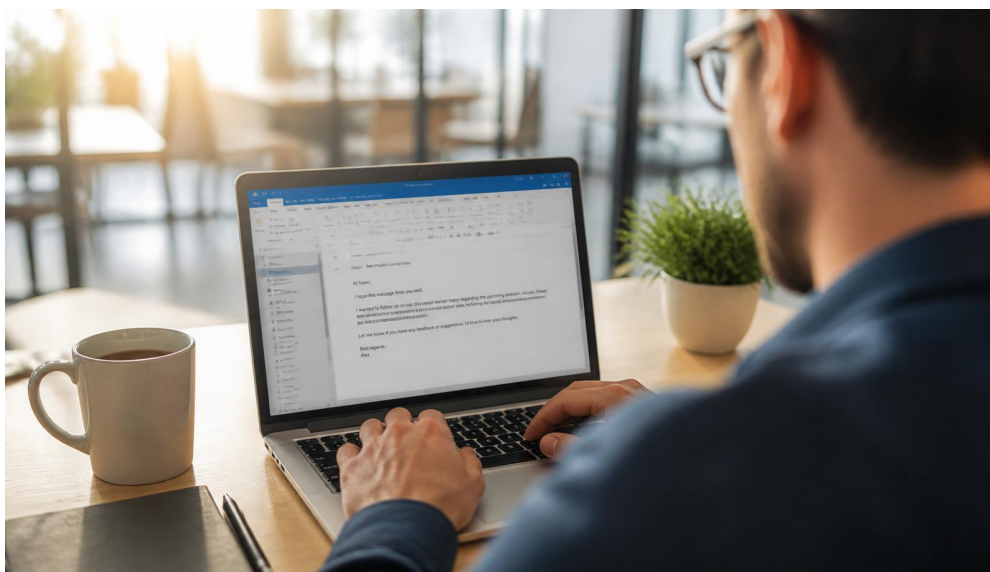


4. A subject line reading 'Following up' is usually...
- (A) Effective
 - (B) Ignored — no context
 - (C) Formal
5. The best subject line, from the lead-in, was...
- (A) Following up
 - (B) Quick question about Q4 forecast
 - (C) URGENT!!! Please read ASAP!!!

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



1. Match the phrase to its function

Match each line to what it *DOES* in the meeting-arranging flow.

1. **phrase:** Would you have 20 minutes next week to discuss X? · **answer:** Proposing

2. **phrase:** Would Tuesday at 10 or Thursday at 3 work for you? · **answer:** Offering time

3. **phrase:** Thursday at 3 works well — I'll send a calendar invite. · **answer:** Accepting / confirming

4. **phrase:** Something urgent has come up — would you mind if we moved to Wednesday? ·
answer: Rescheduling

5. **phrase:** I'll drop a quick recap in writing afterwards. · **answer:** Closing

6. **phrase:** Could I get your direct mobile, just in case? · **answer:** Exchanging contact details

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2. Meeting-arranging gap-fill

Complete with **ONE** word from the box.

Word bank: work · send · mind · agenda · recap · look

1. Would Tuesday at 10 or Thursday at 3 ____ for you?

2. I'll ____ a calendar invite this afternoon.

3. Something urgent has come up — would you ____ if we moved to Wednesday?

4. I'll send an ____ beforehand so we make the most of the time.

5. Thursday's tricky — could we ____ at Friday morning instead?

6. I'll drop a quick ____ in writing afterwards.

2b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a formal email to a potential international partner (150 words) to arrange a high-stakes alignment meeting. You must propose a time, offer flexibility, mention an 'agenda', and promise a 'recap' afterwards. Use the target vocabulary effectively.

id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use professional meeting-arrangement phrases.

Maintain a polite and collaborative tone.

Clearly state the purpose and desired outcome.

model: Subject: Alignment Meeting: Global Expansion Partnership Dear Mr. Tanaka, Following our brief conversation at the summit, I would like to propose a meeting to discuss our potential partnership. Would Wednesday at 10:00 AM JST work for you? If not, please let me know if you would mind if we look at Friday morning instead. I want to ensure we make the most of our time, so I will send a detailed agenda by the end of today for your review. This will allow us to focus on the key LATAM integration points. After our call, I will drop a quick recap in writing to ensure we are aligned on next steps and deliverables. Could I also obtain your direct mobile number, just in case we encounter any connection issues with the video link? I look forward to your confirmation and to the possibility of working together on this ambitious project.

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3. Rewrite as a professional meeting request

Rewrite each blunt request as a polite, specific meeting request.

1. Give me 20 minutes this week.

2. I need to move our Tuesday call.

3. Send me your number.

4. Let's talk about pricing.

4. Fix the meeting request

Each request has ONE main problem. Identify it.

1. Subject: Following up Hi, Let's catch up soon! Thanks.

(A) Register is too formal.

(B) No topic, no duration, no proposed time — places the entire burden on the recipient.

(C) The email is too long.

2. Subject: URGENT!!! Meeting ASAP!!! Hi María, When you get a chance, could we chat about Q3? Thanks!

(A) The subject line screams urgency that doesn't match the calm body.

(B) The register is too friendly.

(C) It's missing a signature.

3. Hi Alex, I'll call you Tuesday at 10.

(A) It's grammatically wrong.

(B) It announces rather than proposes — no chance for Alex to say the time doesn't work.

(C) It's too polite.

5. Contact-details spelling drill

In pairs, take turns dictating the following email addresses and phone numbers over the phone. The partner must read them back digit-by-digit / letter-by-letter to confirm.

1. aditi.rao@brightlights.com

2. j.o'connor@nkg-partners.io

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. +34 612 445 890

4. +81 3 6712 4098

6. Listening — from voicemail to booked meeting

Nadia leaves a voicemail for Alex asking for a follow-up meeting. Alex calls back. Listen for the topic, the time, the format and the contact detail they exchange.

1. What time and format do they agree on?

2. Which contact detail does Alex ask for?

3. What's the fallback plan if Wednesday collapses?

Voice A (voicemail): Hi Alex, Nadia here. Quick one — I'll need us to walk my board through the updated proposal on Wednesday morning if possible. Two changes since we last spoke: we now want to include LATAM, and we'll need a short executive-summary version. Call me back when you can.

Voice B: Hi Nadia, thanks for the voicemail. Would 9:30 Wednesday work for a 45-minute video call? I'll send a shorter draft the evening before so you can react.

Voice A: Perfect.

Voice B: One quick thing — could I get your direct mobile, in case the office line drops out?

Voice A: Sure. +34 612 445 890.

Voice B: Let me read that back — +34 612 445 890. And if Wednesday collapses, we'll move to Thursday afternoon. Have your assistant confirm by end of Tuesday and I'll send an agenda today.

7. Writing — the calendar-invite text

Write the *SHORT* invitation text (60–80 words) for the Wednesday call above. Include: topic, length, time in BOTH time zones (Ams / Madrid), format, one-line agenda, and a closing that offers flexibility. Use at least *THREE* phrases from the Unit 1B phrase bank.

8. Case study reflection

Go back to the *Bright Lights* case (Aditi's first-week meetings). Answer briefly.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Which of Aditi's SIX meetings would you schedule FIRST, and why?

2. What's ONE contact-detail habit Aditi should adopt from day one?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: subject lines

1. Opened first — specific + short
2. Often ignored — no context
3. Deleted — feels like spam

Reading: The three registers of professional email

1. (B) Three: formal / neutral / friendly
2. (B) The workhorse of modern business
3. (B) A common mistake because it reads as slow and distant
4. (B) Neutral register that is still polite

Vocabulary: email register

1. Hi
2. Dear
3. Hey
4. send
5. Kind
6. Cheers
1. Hi María, quick query regarding the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today?
2. I am writing to enquire about the terms of the contract.
3. Hey María ■ just a heads-up that I'll be out of office tomorrow.
4. Could you please send the deck across by end of day?
5. Kind regards, — safe formal closing at the end of an email.

Grammar focus: Modals for polite requests

1. Could you send me the deck by 3pm?
2. Would you be able to review this before Friday?
3. Would you mind taking a quick look at slide 7?
4. Would you mind if we moved our call to Thursday?
5. Could you reply by Monday?
1. "Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire..." (formal)
2. "Hey, quick one — lunch at 1?" (friendly)
3. "Hi María, quick question about the Q4 numbers..." (neutral)
4. "Hi María, just a quick follow-up on invoice #204 — could you let me know the status?" (firm neutral)
1. Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire about the compliance report. (register mismatch)
2. Could you send me the deck by [time]? (add polite modal + deadline)
3. Would you mind reviewing this before Friday? (mind + -ing, not to + verb)

Listening: Voicemail from a client

1. She needs the updated proposal by Wednesday morning.
2. Fairly — her board meets Wednesday afternoon.
3. To send a draft by Tuesday evening and a final version by 9am Wednesday.
1. The scope is bigger — they now want to include the LATAM region.
2. Whether they still want the same 12-month timeline.
3. Alex thanks her and says he'll follow up in writing.
1. Neutral, leaning warm: 'Hi Alex', 'Quick one', 'if possible', 'Thanks'. No formal openers, no emojis.
2. To protect the deadline by giving Nadia reaction time — so the final version isn't the first version she sees.
3. He gets the agreement 'on record' so nothing important lives only in a phone call — protects both sides if the scope drifts.

Quiz

1. (C) Formal
2. (C) Would you mind sending the deck?

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3. (C) reviewing
4. (B) Ignored — no context
5. (B) Quick question about Q4 forecast

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

2. Meeting-arranging gap-fill

1. work
2. send
3. mind
4. agenda
5. look
6. recap

3. Rewrite as a professional meeting request

1. Might you have 20 minutes this week to discuss [topic]? Tuesday or Thursday afternoon would be convenient for me.
2. Something has come up on Tuesday — would you mind if we moved our call to Wednesday afternoon?
3. Could I obtain your direct number, in case the office line becomes unreachable?
4. Could we set up a 30-minute call about pricing next week? I have a slot open at 2pm on Wednesday.

4. Fix the meeting request

1. (B) No topic, no duration, no proposed time — places the entire burden on the recipient.
2. (A) The subject line screams urgency that doesn't match the calm body.
3. (B) It announces rather than proposes — no chance for Alex to say the time doesn't work.

5. Contact-details spelling drill

1. A-D-I-T-I dot R-A-O at brightlights dot com.
2. J dot O apostrophe C-O-N-N-O-R at N-K-G dash partners dot I-O.
3. Plus three-four, six-one-two, four-four-five, eight-nine-zero.
4. Plus eight-one, three, six-seven-one-two, four-zero-nine-eight.

6. Listening — from voicemail to booked meeting

1. Wednesday 9:30 (Amsterdam) for a 45-minute video call, with a draft sent the evening before.
2. Nadia's direct mobile — he reads it back digit-by-digit to confirm.
3. Move to Thursday afternoon — Nadia's assistant will confirm by end of Tuesday.

8. Case study reflection

1. Model: Joris on Friday — she needs manager alignment before her first client-facing calls, and it's his only 20-minute window.
2. Model: always confirm channel preference explicitly ('WhatsApp for urgent, email for the rest') and read back numbers digit-by-digit on the phone.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 2 · B2A

Running a meeting

Theme: Meetings & Decisions



Learning objectives

- Open, chair and close a short update meeting.
- Use present tenses accurately for status updates and standing agendas.
- Assign clear action items with owner + deadline.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Meeting audit

Look at yesterday's / last week's calendar. For each recurring meeting, answer in one word.

Purpose: DECIDE / INFORM / DISCUSS / SOCIAL — which was it, really?

Value: KEEP / SHORTEN / MERGE / KILL — what would you do to it?

Chair: STRONG / OK / MISSING — how well was it led?

You: NEEDED / NICE-TO-HAVE / NOT-NEEDED — should you even have been in it?

Lead-in: meeting sins

Match each behaviour to its label.

1. No agenda, just 'let's sync'

2. One person talks for 40 of 45 minutes

3. It ends and nobody knows who does what

followUp: Which sin is most common in your workplace?

Reading: What good chairs actually do

Most people think chairing a meeting is about talking. It isn't — it's about pacing. A good chair does three things almost invisibly: they open by naming the goal, they steer the middle by asking short questions, and they close by reading back who owns what by when. That's roughly it.

The opening line is the most under-used weapon. Compare 'So... shall we start?' with 'We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make: which vendor we're using for the launch.' The second sentence tells the room the time budget and the outcome, and it takes four seconds. It also gives the chair permission, later, to cut off a tangent with a polite 'let's park that — we've got 12 minutes to decide.'

The closing is where meetings quietly fail. If the chair ends with 'Great chat, thanks everyone,' half the room will leave with a different version of what was agreed. A good close is boring: 'So — Aditi is drafting the RFP by Thursday, Marcus is talking to Legal by Monday, and we regroup next Friday at 10.' Boring, specific, and unmistakable.

1. According to the text, a good chair is mainly good at...

(A) Talking a lot

(B) Pacing — open, steer, close

(C) Being funny

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. What does the opening line 'We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make...' achieve?
 - (A) It's polite
 - (B) It sets time budget AND outcome in 4 seconds
 - (C) It replaces the agenda
3. The phrase 'let's park that' means...
 - (A) Stop the meeting
 - (B) Set the topic aside for later without dismissing it
 - (C) Take a break
4. Why is 'Great chat, thanks everyone' a bad closing?
 - (A) It's rude
 - (B) People leave with different versions of what was agreed
 - (C) It's too short

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

pacing — controlling the speed and flow of something

steer — guide the direction of a conversation

time budget — how much time you have allocated

tangent — a side-topic that pulls the conversation away

park — set aside a topic to return to it later

regroup — meet again after doing separate work

Vocabulary: chairing language & action items

Let's convene. — start the meeting

Quick round of updates? — each person shares briefly

Let's shelve that. — postpone this topic

Let's take that offline. — discuss outside this meeting

Time-check — 10 minutes left. — flag remaining time

Just to make sure we're aligned... — check shared understanding

action item / deliverable — a task assigned in the meeting

owner — the one person accountable

deadline / due date / by EOD / EOW — when it must be done

blocker / bottleneck — what is stopping progress

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follow-up — further work after the meeting

minutes / notes — written record of what was decided

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase/word.

1. Let's ____, everyone — we've got 25 minutes and three decisions to make.

2. Great idea, but let's ____ — we can discuss it after the meeting.

3. Marcus is the ____ for the vendor comparison; deadline is Thursday.

4. The main ____ right now is that Legal hasn't reviewed the terms.

5. ____ — we've got 10 minutes left and haven't touched the budget.

6. I'll send the ____ tonight so everyone has the decisions in writing.

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. Let's <u>start the meeting</u>, everyone — we've got 25 minutes and three decisions to make.

2. Great idea, but let's <u>discuss it outside this meeting</u> — we can chat afterwards.

3. Marcus is the <u>person accountable</u> for the vendor comparison; deadline is Thursday.

4. The main <u>thing stopping progress</u> right now is that Legal hasn't reviewed the terms.

5. I'll send the <u>written record of what was decided</u> tonight so everyone has the decisions in writing.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

prompt: Write a memo to your department head recommending a 'meeting audit' to fix the current culture of monologues and vacuums.

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: Recommendation — Internal Meeting Audit. Following several recent syncs that ended in a decision vacuum, I recommend we conduct a brief audit of our recurring meetings. Too many of our sessions currently lack a clear time budget, leading to monologues that prevent us from reaching a real decision. My proposal is that every chair must open by naming the specific outcome needed and use 'let's park that' or 'take that offline' for any tangent that threatens the pacing. We should also ensure every meeting ends with a clear action item and a named owner to avoid the current bottlenecks. If we can't identify a clear blocker or a reason to regroup weekly, we should consider shelving the meeting entirely. I've drafted some minutes from our last 'wander' to show how much time we could save. Let's ensure we're aligned on this before the next quarter kicks off.



Grammar focus: Present simple vs. present continuous for updates

1. Present simple — routines, standing facts, permanent responsibilities — For things that are always / usually true: • We meet every Monday at 10. • I own the retention metric. • The team ships on Wednesdays.

2. Present continuous — right now, this week / quarter, temporary — For work in progress: • I'm working on the Q4 pitch this week. • We're currently talking to three vendors. • She's covering for Marcus while he's on leave.

3. Common trap — 'stative' verbs stay simple — Some verbs describe states, not actions, and stay in the simple form even for 'right now': • I know / need / want / understand / own — never I'm knowing / I'm owning. • WRONG: I'm knowing the client well. → I know the client well.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise A — Simple or continuous?

Complete each update with the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. This week I ____ (finalise) the vendor shortlist.

2. We ____ (release) a new version every second Thursday.

3. Marcus ____ (be) on leave, so I ____ (cover) his accounts.

4. I ____ (own) the retention KPI on my team.

5. Sorry, could you repeat that? I ____ (not / follow) you.

6. The engineering team ____ (currently / rebuild) the checkout flow.

Exercise B — Fix the mistake

Each meeting update has **ONE** mistake. Rewrite it.

1. I'm owning the retention metric on this team.

2. We meet with the client on Thursday this week, just this once.

3. I don't understanding what the blocker is.

4. Currently, we talk to three vendors before choosing.

Exercise C — 60-second status update

Write a 3-sentence status update using **ONE** present-simple line (permanent responsibility), **ONE** present-continuous line (this week), and **ONE** stative verb.

1. Role: you own onboarding. This week you're rebuilding the welcome email. You think the current copy is too long. →

2. Role: you run the Monday sync. This week you're covering for Karim. You need a decision on the launch date. →

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Listening: A 15-minute weekly sync

It's Monday morning. Priya is chairing the marketing team's weekly sync. On the call are Diego (content) and Nour (paid ads).

pre

What do you think Priya will say in her opening line?

How many action items do you expect by the end?

gist

1. What ONE decision does Priya say the meeting needs to reach?

2. What is Diego's main blocker?

3. How does the meeting end?

detail

1. Which topic does Priya 'park' for later?

2. Why does Nour want to pause the paid campaign?

3. What is Priya's final action item for herself?

Third listen — chair-craft

Focus on HOW Priya chairs. Answer from what she does, not just what she says.

1. What THREE chair moves does Priya use to keep the meeting on time?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Priya doesn't ask 'Any questions?' at the end — why is that a good choice here?

3. Fill in the action-item grid: who / what / by when?

Language from the audio — chair phrases

Find each phrase in the transcript and match it to its function.

"Right — let's kick off." — opens the meeting cleanly, no small talk drift

"one real decision to make" — sets the outcome BEFORE the discussion starts

"Quick round of updates first." — structures the middle so no one dominates

"let's park that" — sets a topic aside without dismissing it

"Time-check —" — protects the ending without needing to interrupt

"Anything I'm missing?" — closed final check — invites gaps, not new topics

Voice A (Priya): Right — let's kick off. We've got 15 minutes and one real decision to make: whether we push the launch by a week. Quick round of updates first. Diego?

Voice B (Diego): Content's about 80% ready. My blocker is Legal — I'm still waiting on final copy approval. If it doesn't land by Wednesday, we can't hit Friday.

Voice C (Nour): On paid — I'm actually going to suggest we pause the campaign for two days. CPC has doubled since last Wednesday. Something's off in the audience targeting.

Voice A: Okay. And the landing-page rebrand — how's that going?

Voice B: That's more of a Q1 thing, honestly.

Voice A: Fine, let's park that — separate conversation. Time-check: we've got 8 minutes. So on the launch date: Diego, if Legal doesn't reply by end of Wednesday, we push. Nour, pause paid tomorrow morning, investigate, and update me by Thursday lunch. I'll talk to the CEO by Wednesday about the potential push. Anything I'm missing?

Voice C: Nope, that's clear.

Voice A: Great. I'll send the minutes in 20 minutes. Same time next Monday.

Speaking: solo role-play — chair a 5-minute sync

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario below. Record yourself (voice note, 3–4 min) as the chair running the meeting — imagine the other voices in the room. You MUST use at least ONE opening line, ONE 'park' or 'take offline' move, ONE time-check, and close with named action items (owner + deadline). Play back and self-score against the checklist.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

**Scene:** Product team, Monday sync

A: You chair — decision needed: ship a buggy feature this week or delay two weeks.

B: Imagined voices: one blocked by QA, one throwing in a wild off-topic idea.

Scene: Client kick-off

A: You chair (agency side) — need to agree scope + weekly cadence.

B: Imagined voices: a very talkative client CTO and one silent stakeholder.

Scene: Freelance status update

A: You chair (the freelancer).

B: Imagined voices: two client stakeholders with conflicting priorities.

Extra speaking task — 60-second stand-up

Now record a *60-second* solo stand-up as if you're opening TOMORROW's real meeting from your own week. Three sentences: (1) what we're deciding, (2) what's blocking, (3) the time budget. Land at least TWO chairing phrases from today's lesson.

Writing mini-task

Write the meeting minutes for the Priya/Diego/Nour sync above in 60–90 words. Include: date, attendees, ONE decision, THREE action items (owner + deadline each).

Wrap-up

One chairing phrase you'll steal for your next meeting.

One thing you'll STOP doing in meetings.

One decision from your calendar this week that deserves its own 15-min meeting.

Quiz

1. Which is the strongest OPENING line for a 30-minute sync?

(A) "So... shall we start?"

(B) "We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make."

(C) "Hi everyone, how was your weekend?"

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. 'Let's park that' means...
 - (A) Stop the meeting
 - (B) Set the topic aside for later
 - (C) Take a break
3. Choose the correct sentence.
 - (A) I'm owning the retention metric.
 - (B) I own the retention metric.
 - (C) I owning the retention metric.
4. Which is the BEST closing move?
 - (A) "Great chat, thanks!"
 - (B) Read back action items with owners and deadlines.
 - (C) Ask if anyone has more to add.
5. 'CPC has doubled since last Wednesday.' The best tense for THIS WEEK's temporary action is...
 - (A) Present simple: I pause the campaign.
 - (B) Present continuous: I'm pausing the campaign tomorrow.
 - (C) Past simple: I paused the campaign.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Chairing phrases

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

Word bank: Let's convene · take that offline · Time-check · shelve that · deliverable · minutes

1. ____, everyone — we've got 20 minutes and two decisions to make.

2. Great idea, but let's ____ — separate conversation.

3. Interesting, but let's ____; I'll ping you after.

4. ____: we've got 5 minutes left and haven't covered budget.

5. That's a ____ for Marcus, due end of Wednesday.

6. I'll circulate the ____ tonight so nobody forgets what was agreed.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word memo to your management team analyzing the current 'meeting culture' in your department. Discuss how you intend to use better 'chairing' techniques to improve efficiency, mentioning specific strategies like 'time-checks' and 'taking things offline'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use at least 5 target vocabulary items.

Demonstrate authoritative leadership register.

Focus on specific outcomes and deliverables.

Structure with clear headings or bullet points.

model: To: Leadership Team From: Operations Director Subject: Improving Meeting Efficiency and Culture Recent data suggests that we are losing significant productivity to 'the drift' in our weekly syncs. From next week, I will be implementing a stricter chairing protocol. To start, I will use 'Let's convene' exactly on the hour, regardless of attendance. We will implement a strict time-check every 15 minutes to ensure we remain on track for our primary objective. To prevent the 'wander', I will request that we take any non-essential technical discussions offline for separate follow-up. If a topic requires more data, we will shelve that until the following week rather than speculating. Each meeting must end with at least one clear deliverable with a named owner and deadline. Finally, I will personally circulate the minutes within two hours to ensure immediate accountability. These changes are designed to respect everyone's time and focus our collective energy on execution. I appreciate your support in enforcing these new standards.

Exercise 2 — Present simple or continuous?

Choose the correct form for each meeting update.

1. This week I ____ (interview) the final three vendor candidates.

2. We ____ (release) a patch every second Tuesday.

3. Sofia ____ (cover) Ben's accounts while he ____ (be) on paternity leave.

4. I ____ (own) the churn metric on this team.

5. Currently we ____ (evaluate) three CRMs before we commit.

6. Sorry — I ____ (not / understand) what you mean by 'blocker' in this context.

Exercise 3 — Diagnose the meeting sin

Which meeting sin does each situation show?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 45-minute meeting; one person speaks for 40 minutes.
 - (A) the drift
 - (B) the wander
 - (C) the monologue
 - (D) the vacuum
2. Team leaves; nobody knows who does what by when.
 - (A) the drift
 - (B) the wander
 - (C) the monologue
 - (D) the vacuum
3. Meeting starts 12 minutes late every single week.
 - (A) the drift
 - (B) the wander
 - (C) the monologue
 - (D) the vacuum
4. No agenda; a 'quick sync' becomes a 55-minute chat.
 - (A) the drift
 - (B) the wander
 - (C) the monologue
 - (D) the vacuum

Exercise 4 — Fix the update

Each meeting update has ONE mistake. Rewrite it.

1. I'm owning the retention KPI on this team.

2. We meet the CFO this Thursday, just this once.

3. I don't understanding what the blocker is.

4. Currently, we talk to three vendors before choosing one.

Exercise 5 — Three chair openings

You'll hear three different chairs opening the same 30-minute Monday sync.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Which opening sets a time budget AND an outcome?

2. Which opening is the vaguest?

3. Which chair parks a topic within the first minute?

Voice A: Opening 1: So... shall we start? What's on people's minds this week?

Voice B: Opening 2: Right, let's kick off. We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make: whether to ship on Friday. Quick round of updates first, then we decide.

Voice C: Opening 3: Morning everyone. Great — before Diego jumps in, let's park the rebrand for later and stay on the launch. Nour, kick us off.

Exercise 6 — Write the minutes

Write 60–80 words of meeting minutes for a real meeting you attended this week. Include: date, one decision, three action items (owner + deadline each).

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection

Think about the Karib Logistics 'weekly-that-should-be-monthly'. Answer the questions.

1. Rewrite the founder's opening line for the new MONTHLY all-hands (max 25 words).

2. What ONE metric would prove your new operating model is working after 3 months?

3. What would you tell a manager who kept scheduling a 60-minute call for a 15-minute topic?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: meeting sins

1. the wander
2. the monologue
3. the vacuum

Reading: What good chairs actually do

1. (B) Pacing — open, steer, close
2. (B) It sets time budget AND outcome in 4 seconds
3. (B) Set the topic aside for later without dismissing it
4. (B) People leave with different versions of what was agreed

Vocabulary: chairing language & action items

1. convene
 2. take that offline
 3. owner
 4. blocker
 5. Time-check
 6. minutes
1. Let's convene, everyone — we've got 25 minutes and three decisions to make.
 2. Great idea, but let's take that offline — we can chat afterwards.
 3. Marcus is the owner for the vendor comparison; deadline is Thursday.
 4. The main blocker right now is that Legal hasn't reviewed the terms.
 5. I'll send the minutes tonight so everyone has the decisions in writing.

Grammar focus: Present simple vs. present continuous for updates

1. am finalising / 'm finalising
 2. release
 3. is; am covering / 'm covering
 4. own
 5. don't follow
 6. is currently rebuilding / 's currently rebuilding
1. I own the retention metric on this team. ('own' is stative)
 2. We're meeting with the client on Thursday this week, just this once. (one-off → continuous)
 3. I don't understand what the blocker is.
 4. Currently, we're talking to three vendors before choosing.
1. Model: 'I own the onboarding flow. This week I'm rebuilding the welcome email based on last month's data. I think the current copy is too long — three CTAs is two too many.'
 2. Model: 'I run the Monday sync. This week I'm also covering Karim's accounts while he's on leave. I need a decision on the launch date by Wednesday.'

Listening: A 15-minute weekly sync

1. Whether to push the launch date by a week.
 2. He's waiting on final copy approval from Legal.
 3. Priya reads back three action items with owners and deadlines.
1. The rebrand of the landing page.
 2. Cost per click has doubled in the last five days.
 3. Talk to the CEO by Wednesday about the launch date.
1. (1) An opening that names time budget + one decision, (2) 'let's park that' on the rebrand tangent, (3) a mid-meeting time-check ('we've got 8 minutes').
 2. She replaces an open prompt with a closed one: 'Anything I'm missing?' — invites a specific gap, not a new discussion.
 3. Diego — chase Legal, push if no reply by end of Wed. Nour — pause paid tomorrow AM, investigate, update Priya by Thu lunch. Priya — speak to CEO by Wed re: launch date. All three: owner + verb + deadline.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Quiz

1. (B) "We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make."
2. (B) Set the topic aside for later
3. (B) I own the retention metric.
4. (B) Read back action items with owners and deadlines.
5. (B) Present continuous: I'm pausing the campaign tomorrow.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Chairing phrases

1. Let's convene
2. shelve that
3. take that offline
4. Time-check
5. deliverable
6. minutes

Exercise 2 — Present simple or continuous?

1. am interviewing / 'm interviewing
2. release
3. is covering / 's covering; is
4. own
5. are evaluating / 're evaluating
6. don't understand

Exercise 3 — Diagnose the meeting sin

1. (C) the monologue
2. (D) the vacuum
3. (A) the drift
4. (B) the wander

Exercise 4 — Fix the update

1. I own the retention KPI on this team.
2. We're meeting the CFO this Thursday, just this once.
3. I don't understand what the blocker is.
4. Currently, we're talking to three vendors before choosing one.

Exercise 5 — Three chair openings

1. Opening 2 — 'We've got 30 minutes and one decision to make: whether to ship on Friday.'
2. Opening 1 — 'So... shall we start? What's on people's minds?'
3. Opening 3 — 'Great — before Diego jumps in, let's park the rebrand for later and stay on the launch.'

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection

1. Model: 'Thirty minutes, three things: one number I care about, one win from the field, one story from Casablanca.'
2. Model: hours spent in company-wide meetings dropped by >70% AND engagement-survey 'Monday sync' score improved by ≥ 20 points.
3. Model: 'Time-check culture — every meeting starts with time budget + outcome. Anything under 30 minutes is a standup, not a meeting.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 2 · B2B

Reaching consensus

Theme: Meetings & Decisions



Learning objectives

- Push a group to a clear decision without steamrolling anyone.
- Use modals of obligation and suggestion appropriately.
- Disagree in a way that keeps the relationship intact.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Would you rather?

For each pair, pick ONE and explain in one sentence. No 'it depends'.

Would you rather work with someone who agrees with you and doesn't deliver, or disagrees loudly and does?

Would you rather have a boss who decides fast and is sometimes wrong, or slowly and is usually right?

Would you rather leave a meeting having lost the argument, or having 'won' by not really saying what you thought?

Would you rather commit to a decision you don't fully believe in, or block it and delay everyone by two weeks?

Lead-in: fake consensus

Match each scene to the type of fake agreement.

1. Everyone nods; the loudest voice 'wins'.

2. Agreed in the room, complained in Slack.

3. No one disagrees, no one commits.

followUp: Which do you see most often?

Reading: Disagree and commit

'Disagree and commit' has become one of the most quoted phrases in modern business, mostly because it names a real problem: teams that either can't disagree at all, or can't stop disagreeing long enough to actually do anything. The idea is simple. You get your objection on the table clearly. You are heard. A decision is made — sometimes not the one you wanted. And then you commit to it as if it were yours.

For that to work, two things need to be safe. Disagreement has to be welcome, not punished — otherwise you get the silent-nod consensus that quietly falls apart in the corridor afterwards. And commitment has to be visible — the person who lost the argument has to actively support the decision publicly, not just stop resisting it.

The B2-level phrases that make this real are boring on purpose. 'I hear you, but I still think we should...' opens a disagreement without heat. 'I'm not fully convinced, but I can live with that' is the sound of someone committing without pretending. And 'What would need to be true for you to be comfortable with this?' is the single most useful sentence when a group is stuck — because it moves the argument from positions to conditions.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The main idea of 'disagree and commit' is...
 - (A) Always win the argument
 - (B) Object clearly, then support the decision as if it were yours
 - (C) Never disagree
2. The 'silent-nod consensus' fails because...
 - (A) It's too fast
 - (B) People agree in the room and complain later
 - (C) It's illegal
3. According to the writer, 'I'm not fully convinced, but I can live with that' is an example of...
 - (A) Bad manners
 - (B) Genuine commitment without pretending
 - (C) Weak leadership
4. 'What would need to be true for you to be comfortable with this?' moves the argument from...
 - (A) Words to numbers
 - (B) Positions to conditions
 - (C) Team to team

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

get on the table — state something openly so it can be discussed

corridor decision — the real decision made informally outside the meeting

commit — publicly support a decision and act on it

objection — a reason for disagreeing with a proposal

stuck — unable to move forward

position — the surface answer someone is defending

Vocabulary: agreeing, disagreeing, hedging

Fully aligned with you on that. — strong agreement

That stacks up for me. — neutral, professional agreement

I can get behind that. — committing without pretending to love it

I take your point, but... — acknowledge before pushing back

I'm not fully convinced. — polite, direct disagreement

I see it slightly differently. — very soft opener for pushback

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



With respect, I'd challenge that. — firm, still respectful

It might be worth... — suggest without owning it fully

One avenue would be to... — float a possibility

I could be off base, but... — softens a strong claim

Correct me if I'm off, but... — invites correction

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase.

1. ____ your point on speed, but the quality trade-off worries me.

2. ____, but couldn't we test with 50 users first before a full rollout?

3. I don't love this option, but ____ if the team feels strongly.

4. ____ — I don't think price is our real problem, positioning is.

5. ____ we're solving the wrong problem here?

6. That ____ for me — let's go with it.

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. <u>I acknowledge your point</u> on speed, but the quality trade-off worries me.

2. <u>One possibility</u> would be to test with 50 users first before a full rollout.

3. I don't love this option, but <u>I can support that</u> if the team feels strongly.

4. <u>With all due respect, I would like to challenge</u> that — I don't think price is our real problem.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

5. That <u>is a logical argument</u> for me — let's go with it.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a debrief email to your leadership team after a difficult decision where you used the 'disagree and commit' framework.

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: Decision Debrief — APAC Market Entry. We reached a final decision today on the APAC timeline. While I was initially stuck on the risk of a Q4 launch, I made sure to get my objection on the table early. I'm still not fully convinced that we have the support staff ready, and I see the risk slightly differently than the Sales team does. However, Yui asked 'what would need to be true for you to be comfortable with this?', and we've now added a condition regarding a signed NDA for the first three pilots. With that guardrail in place, I can get behind the decision. I am now fully committed to the Friday rollout and will support the team publicly. This was a classic 'disagree and commit' moment that avoided a corridor decision later. My position has been heard, the conditions have been met, and the plan stacks up for me now.



Grammar focus: Modals of obligation & suggestion

1. Must / have to — strong obligation — Use for things that are non-negotiable: • We must ship before Q4. • We have to inform Legal today. Difference: 'must' often feels internal ('I decided this'); 'have to' often external ('the rule says so').

2. Should / ought to — recommendation — For advice / preferred option (not obligation): • We should test with 50 users first. • You ought to loop in Marketing before deciding.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Could / might — soft suggestion — For possibilities you're floating, not defending: • We could delay the launch by one week. • It might be worth splitting the rollout by region. Great for surfacing options without owning them.

4. Don't have to ≠ mustn't — 'Don't have to' = it isn't necessary. 'Mustn't' = it is forbidden. • You don't have to attend Friday's demo (optional). • You mustn't share this before the announcement (forbidden).

Exercise A — Pick the right modal

Choose the best modal for each situation.

1. The launch date is contractual. We ____ ship before Q4.

2. It's just an idea, but we ____ pilot in one region first.

3. Legally, you ____ share these figures externally before Tuesday.

4. It's optional — you ____ attend Friday's demo if you're busy.

5. Given the customer complaints, we probably ____ apologise publicly.

Exercise B — Soften the tone

Rewrite each blunt sentence using a softer modal + phrase from vocab.

1. Cancel the campaign now.

2. You're wrong about the pricing.

3. Do the vendor call yourself.

4. Push the deadline.

Exercise C — Disagree, then commit

Read each mini-scenario. Write (a) ONE polite disagreement line and (b) ONE 'I can live with that' commit line the SAME person could say five minutes later, if outvoted.

1. The team wants to launch on Friday; you think Monday is safer.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. The CEO wants to cut the free plan; you think it will hurt top-of-funnel.

3. Your teammate wants to accept a rush job over the weekend; you want to say no.

Listening: A stuck decision — 6-minute board room extract

Three founders are trying to decide whether to accept a discounted enterprise deal that would fill Q4 but hurt their price positioning. The chair is Yui; the other two are Karim and Ellie.

pre

What do you think each founder will care about most?

How will the chair try to unstick the group?

gist

1. What is the decision on the table?

2. Who is FOR and who is AGAINST?

3. How is the meeting unblocked?

detail

1. What condition does Ellie need to say yes?

2. What condition does Karim need to say yes?

3. What does Yui decide by the end?

Third listen — what unstuck the group?

Answer from what is IMPLIED in HOW they speak.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. At what exact moment does the decision start moving forward — and why?

2. Karim says 'I can live with that' rather than 'I agree'. What's the difference in commitment?

3. Who owns each of the two conditions after the meeting?

Language from the audio — decision moves

Match each phrase to what it *DOES* in a stuck decision.

"I hear the concern about pricing, but..." — acknowledge before pushing back

"Respectfully, I'd push back on that." — firm disagreement that keeps the relationship intact

"We've been circling this for 20 minutes." — names the stuckness out loud — permission to change tack

"What would need to be true for each of you to be comfortable with a yes?" — converts positions into conditions

"Can we both live with that?" — asks for real commitment, not enthusiasm

"Good. Committed. Let's move on." — closes the loop and blocks re-litigation

Voice A (Yui): Alright — 40% discount to fill Q4. Where are we? Ellie?

Voice B (Ellie): I'm fully for it. It de-risks the quarter and buys us time to raise properly next year. I hear the concern about pricing, but a discount that never leaves the room isn't a pricing problem.

Voice C (Karim): Respectfully, I'd push back on that. Discounts always leak. And the moment they do, our list price becomes fiction. I'm not fully convinced this is worth it.

Voice A: Okay. We've been circling this for 20 minutes. Let me try something. What would need to be true for each of you to be comfortable with a yes?

Voice B: Honestly? A signed NDA on the pricing terms. If they leak it, it's a breach, not gossip.

Voice C: For me, this has to be the LAST one. Written internal rule: no more discounts above 20% for the next two quarters. Otherwise we're just talking, not deciding.

Voice A: Okay. That's actually a decision. We accept the deal, NDA on pricing, and I write the internal rule and share it with Sales on Monday. Can we both live with that?

Voice B: Yes.

Voice C: I can live with that.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice A: Good. Committed. Let's move on.

Speaking: solo role-play — unstick the stuck group

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario below. Record yourself (voice note, 3–4 min) as the chair — imagine the two opposing voices in the room. You MUST use the 'What would need to be true...' move AT LEAST ONCE, and close by naming the decision using disagree-and-commit language. Play back and self-score.

Scene: Should we return to the office 3 days a week?

A: You chair — neutral.

B: Imagined voices: one team member strongly for, one strongly against.

Scene: Should we sunset the old free plan?

A: You chair — mildly for.

B: Imagined voices: one worried about churn, one worried about margins.

Scene: Should we do the client's rush job over the weekend?

A: You chair (the freelancer).

B: Imagined voices: a client contact who wants yes and a colleague who wants no.

Extra speaking task — 60-second 'commit' message

Record a 60-second Slack-style voice note to your team AFTER the decision. Say clearly: (1) what was decided, (2) that you disagreed, (3) that you're now publicly committed and why. Land at least TWO disagree-and-commit phrases from today's lesson.

Writing mini-task

Write a 60–80 word 'decision note' summarising the Yui/Karim/Ellie decision. Include: the decision, the two conditions, the owner of each condition, and the deadline.

Wrap-up

One disagree-and-commit phrase you'll try in your next meeting.

One decision this quarter that deserves 'What would need to be true...?'

One modal (must / have to / should / could / might) you overuse.

Quiz

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'Disagree and commit' means...
 - (A) Never disagree
 - (B) Object clearly, then publicly support the decision
 - (C) Vote every time
2. The most useful UNBLOCKING question is...
 - (A) 'Why are you being difficult?'
 - (B) 'What would need to be true for you to be comfortable with this?'
 - (C) 'Can we vote?'
3. Choose the SOFTEST disagreement.
 - (A) You're wrong.
 - (B) I see it slightly differently.
 - (C) Absolutely not.
4. Pick the correct modal: 'It's optional — you ____ attend if you're busy.'
 - (A) mustn't
 - (B) don't have to
 - (C) have to
5. 'I can live with that' signals...
 - (A) Enthusiastic agreement
 - (B) Committing without pretending to love it
 - (C) Rejection

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Agree / disagree / hedge

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

Word bank: I take your point, but · One avenue would be to · I can get behind that · I could be off base, but · With respect, I'd challenge that · stacks up for me

1. ____ your point on cost, quality still worries me.

2. ____ pilot with two regions before a full rollout.

3. It's not my favourite outcome, but ____ if the team commits.

4. ____ on the pricing call — I think we're underselling.

5. ____ we're solving the wrong problem here entirely?

6. That ____ — let's go with it.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word discursive piece for your internal strategy blog regarding a proposed change in company direction (e.g., moving to a fully remote model or changing your core product). Use hedging and consensus-building language from the unit to present a balanced view.

id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use at least 5 target vocabulary items.

Use professional 'softening' language for disagreement.

Present a balanced argument with multiple perspectives.

Conclude with a clear recommendation or next step.

model: Strategic Reflection: The Move to a 'Remote-First' Model The current debate regarding our return-to-office policy has highlighted several valid perspectives. I take your point regarding the loss of spontaneous collaboration; however, the productivity gains we've seen since 2020 are undeniable. One avenue would be to adopt a hybrid model that mandates specific 'collaboration days' while leaving the rest to individual choice. I could be off base, but I suspect the resistance isn't to the office itself, but to the commute. With respect, I'd challenge the idea that culture can only be built in a physical lobby. I can get behind the transition to remote-first if we invest heavily in asynchronous communication tools. To me, the data regarding talent retention in a remote-first environment really stacks up for me. It is clear that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. We should run a 90-day pilot with the engineering team before committing to a company-wide mandate. I look forward to hearing your thoughts in the Slack channel.

Exercise 2 — Modal of obligation / suggestion

Choose the correct modal.

1. Legally, we ____ inform Legal before Tuesday. (obligation, external)

2. It's just a thought, but we ____ split the rollout by region. (soft suggestion)

3. You ____ share these numbers externally — under NDA. (forbidden)

4. It's optional — you ____ attend Friday's demo. (not necessary)

5. Given the customer complaints, we probably ____ apologise publicly. (recommendation)

6. The contract is clear — we ____ ship before 31 December. (strong obligation)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 3 — Which type of fake consensus?

Which type of fake consensus is happening?

1. The team agrees in the room, then complains loudly in Slack that evening.
(A) false consensus
(B) corridor decision
(C) polite drift
2. Everyone nods; the loudest voice's proposal 'wins' unopposed.
(A) false consensus
(B) corridor decision
(C) polite drift
3. No one disagrees, but no one owns anything either — nothing happens.
(A) false consensus
(B) corridor decision
(C) polite drift

Exercise 4 — Soften the tone

Rewrite each blunt line more professionally.

1. You're wrong about the pricing.

2. Cancel the campaign now.

3. Do the client call yourself.

4. Just push the deadline.

Exercise 5 — Three ways of disagreeing

Three people give feedback on the same proposal (cutting the free plan). Which one commits, which just objects, which drifts?

1. Who OBJECTS and COMMITS at the end?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Who just KEEPS objecting without committing?

3. Who drifts — no clear yes, no clear no?

Voice A (Diego): I really don't like this. Killing the free plan is going to hurt us with startups. I really don't like it. Really.

Voice B (Nour): I'm not fully convinced either — I hear you both — but I can live with that, provided we honour existing free users for six months. Non-negotiable for me.

Voice C (Sana): I mean... let's see how it goes. We can always revisit if numbers don't work out. Right? Yeah.

Exercise 6 — Write the decision note

Write a 60–80 word decision note for a real decision your team made recently. Include: the decision, one condition attached, the owner of the condition, and the deadline.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: 3-day-office mandate

Reflect on the Meridian Health case.

1. Write the SINGLE 'What would need to be true...' question you'd bring to the CEO 1:1.

2. If the CEO refuses to move, what do you commit to publicly on Friday?

3. Name ONE decision in your own life this month that deserves 'disagree and commit'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: fake consensus

1. the false consensus
2. the corridor decision
3. the polite drift

Reading: Disagree and commit

1. (B) Object clearly, then support the decision as if it were yours
2. (B) People agree in the room and complain later
3. (B) Genuine commitment without pretending
4. (B) Positions to conditions

Vocabulary: agreeing, disagreeing, hedging

1. I take your point, but
2. One avenue would be to
3. I can get behind that
4. With respect, I'd challenge that
5. I could be off base, but
6. stacks up
1. I take your point, but the quality trade-off worries me.
2. One avenue would be to test with 50 users first before a full rollout.
3. I don't love this option, but I can get behind that if the team feels strongly.
4. With respect, I'd challenge that — I don't think price is our real problem.
5. That stacks up for me — let's go with it.

Grammar focus: Modals of obligation & suggestion

1. must / have to
2. could / might
3. mustn't / must not
4. don't have to
5. should / ought to
1. It might be worth pausing the campaign for a couple of days while we investigate.
2. I could be wrong, but I'm not fully convinced about the pricing.
3. One option would be for you to take the vendor call directly.
4. We could push the deadline by a week if that helps Legal keep up.
1. Model: (a) 'I hear the momentum argument, but I'm not fully convinced Friday gives us enough time for QA.'
- (b) 'I still prefer Monday, but I can live with Friday if we agree Nour is the on-call owner over the weekend.'
2. Model: (a) 'Respectfully, I'd push back on that — I could be wrong, but I think free is doing more for us than the margin line suggests.'
- (b) 'I don't love the decision, but I can live with it if we track sign-up drop-off weekly for the next quarter.'
3. Model: (a) 'I see it slightly differently — I think saying yes here trains this client that rush requests always work.'
- (b) 'I still wouldn't do it, but I can live with a yes IF we send a written note that this is a one-off.'

Listening: A stuck decision — 6-minute board room extract

1. Whether to accept a big enterprise deal at a 40% discount.
2. Ellie is for (fills the quarter). Karim is against (hurts price positioning). Yui is undecided.
3. Yui asks: 'What would need to be true for each of you to be comfortable with this?'
1. A signed NDA so the discount doesn't leak to other customers.
2. That this is the LAST discounted deal — a written internal rule.
3. Accept the deal, both conditions attached, and communicate the new rule to Sales on Monday.
1. When Yui says 'What would need to be true for each of you to be comfortable with a yes?' — it flips the discussion from defending positions (yes/no) to naming conditions (what it would take).
2. Same public commitment, more honest signal — he'll actively support the decision without pretending he thinks it's the best option. Classic 'disagree and commit'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. NDA on pricing — implied Sales / Ellie's side to secure with the customer. Written internal rule (max 20% discount) — Yui writes it and shares with Sales on Monday.

Quiz

1. (B) Object clearly, then publicly support the decision
2. (B) 'What would need to be true for you to be comfortable with this?'
3. (B) I see it slightly differently.
4. (B) don't have to
5. (B) Committing without pretending to love it

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Agree / disagree / hedge

1. I take your point, but
2. One avenue would be to
3. I can get behind that
4. With respect, I'd challenge that
5. I could be off base, but
6. stacks up for me

Exercise 2 — Modal of obligation / suggestion

1. have to / must
2. could / might
3. mustn't / must not
4. don't have to
5. should / ought to
6. must / have to

Exercise 3 — Which type of fake consensus?

1. (B) corridor decision
2. (A) false consensus
3. (C) polite drift

Exercise 4 — Soften the tone

1. I could be wrong, but I'm not fully convinced about the pricing.
2. It might be worth pausing the campaign while we investigate.
3. One option would be for you to take the client call directly.
4. We could push the deadline by a week if that helps.

Exercise 5 — Three ways of disagreeing

1. Speaker 2 — Nour: 'I'm not fully convinced... but I can live with that, provided we honour existing free users for six months.'
2. Speaker 1 — Diego: says 'I really don't like this' three times, but never says what would change his mind.
3. Speaker 3 — Sana: 'I mean... let's see how it goes... we can always revisit.'

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: 3-day-office mandate

1. Model: 'What would need to be true for you to be comfortable with 2 mandatory + 1 team-choice day, so we protect the engineering hires you personally approved?'
2. Model: publicly support the mandate; privately handle transition and one-off exceptions; no hinting at disagreement in Slack. Or don't say yes on Wednesday.
3. Model: any team / family decision where you're objecting privately but nodding publicly — get it on the table this week.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 3 · B3A

The customer story

Theme: Selling & Storytelling



Learning objectives

- Tell a 2-minute customer success story with a clear before / after.
- Use narrative tenses (past simple, past continuous, past perfect) accurately.
- Separate features, benefits and pain points in your own product language.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Story bank

List **THREE** moments from your own work where something changed for a customer / user / client. Rank them from most to least tellable in a 2-minute story. Which one has the clearest 'before' and 'after'?

A customer who almost churned but stayed — what changed?

A user who did something with your product you never expected.

A client who complained hard, then became your loudest advocate.

A moment you personally felt 'this is why we built this'.

Lead-in: what's missing?

Match each flat story to the piece that's missing.

1. 'We deployed our platform and the client was happy.'

2. 'They were losing 20% of leads. We fixed it.'

3. 'It's an enterprise-grade, AI-driven solution.'

followUp: Which mistake does your team make most?

Reading: Before / How / After

A good B2B customer story has almost the same shape every time. Someone had a specific, expensive problem. Something happened. Now the problem is measurably smaller. Before, how, after — in about 90 seconds. Everything else is decoration.

The single most common mistake is skipping the 'before'. Sellers who know their product too well often open with 'We helped them roll out our platform', which lands with a shrug — the listener has no idea what changed, because they never heard what was broken. Compare that with 'They were losing about 40 hours of engineering time every week to the same three support tickets.' Now the listener is leaning in, because there is finally a number attached to the pain.

The 'how' is where features actually belong — but as verbs, not adjectives. Not 'our AI-powered classification engine', but 'we auto-routed the three ticket types their engineers hated most'. And the 'after' has to be a number the buyer would recognise as valuable: hours saved, deals closed, churn dropped, response time halved. If you can't quantify the after, the story is a testimonial, not a case study.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. According to the text, a good customer story has three parts. They are...
 - (A) Product, price, plan
 - (B) Before, how, after
 - (C) Client, competitor, contract
2. The most common mistake sellers make is...
 - (A) Talking too long
 - (B) Skipping the 'before' — the pain
 - (C) Using too many numbers
3. Features are best expressed as...
 - (A) Adjectives ('AI-powered')
 - (B) Verbs ('we auto-routed...')
 - (C) Product codes
4. Without a measurable 'after', the story becomes...
 - (A) A pitch
 - (B) A testimonial, not a case study
 - (C) A cold email

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

pain point — a specific, painful problem the customer feels regularly

roll out — deploy or launch something to users

flat (story) — technically correct but with no emotional pull

testimonial — an unquantified quote of praise

case study — a story of change with numbers attached

leaning in — engaged, paying closer attention

Vocabulary: features, benefits and pain points

feature — the precise technical capability the product delivers

benefit — the tangible value the customer derives from that capability

outcome — the quantifiable business result attributable to the intervention

use case — the specific job the customer hires the product to do

pain point — the specific hurt the buyer feels

friction — recurring micro-frictions that erode momentum and morale

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



churn — customers leaving over time

bottleneck — the one step everything else is waiting on

workaround — the improvised, unsustainable fix teams tolerate before adoption

root cause — the real underlying reason for a problem

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. The team's real ____ was that every export took 40 minutes and blocked the whole reporting cycle.

2. Before us, their ____ was a Google Sheet copied and pasted every Monday morning.

3. Auto-routing tickets is a ____; getting weekends back is the ____.

4. We didn't just fix the symptom — we found the ____: their onboarding email had a broken link.

5. The chief source of ____ emerged in month two, when trial users were forced to re-enter their card details.

6. Their ____ dropped from 6% to 2.4% in one quarter.

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 team's real <u>step that everything else was waiting on</u> was that every export took 40 minutes.

2. Before us, their <u>improvised, unsustainable fix</u> was a Google Sheet copied and pasted every Monday.

3. Auto-routing tickets is a <u>technical capability</u>; getting weekends back is the <u>tangible value</u>.

4. We didn't just fix the symptom — we found the <u>real underlying reason</u>.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. The chief source of <u>recurring micro-friction</u> emerged in month two.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write an analysis for the sales team comparing a failed testimonial with a successful case study you recently produced.

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: Analysis — Why 'Testimonials' are Failing our Pipeline. I've reviewed our recent collateral and noticed that our 'customer success' slides are often landing flat because they lack a clear 'before' state. A quote saying 'the team loved the rollout' is a nice testimonial, but it doesn't solve a prospect's pain point. In contrast, our Northlake case study is winning because it identifies a specific bottleneck: 40 hours of manual reporting. By focusing on the root cause—a routing problem, not a data problem—we showed how we eliminated friction. The outcome was a measurable 75% reduction in analyst time. When we pitch, we must stop listing features as adjectives and start describing them as verbs that solve a specific use case. Prospects only start leaning in when they see a quantified 'after' that matches their own internal struggles with churn or workarounds.



Grammar focus: Narrative tenses for customer stories

1. Past simple — the spine of the story — For finished events, in order: • They signed with us in March. • We ran a two-week pilot. • Churn dropped by 60% in Q2.

2. Past continuous — the background at that moment — For what was already happening when the event took place: • They were losing 20% of leads every month when they contacted us. • Sales were dropping while marketing kept blaming pricing.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Past perfect — the earlier past — For something that happened BEFORE the main past event — usually to explain why: • They had tried three other tools before they came to us. • By the time we met, their VP had already resigned.

4. Order matters — mix them like this — Typical opening: past continuous (situation) + past simple (event) + past perfect (cause). • 'They were leaking 20% of leads (background) when they called us (event). They had just lost their biggest customer (earlier cause).'

Exercise A — Choose the correct narrative tense

Put the verb in brackets in the best narrative tense.

1. When they signed with us, they ____ (already / try) three other tools.

2. Their team ____ (lose) about 40 hours a week to manual reporting at that point.

3. We ____ (run) a two-week pilot, and churn ____ (drop) from 6% to 2.4%.

4. By the time we met the CEO, marketing ____ (already / cut) the budget by half.

5. While the engineers ____ (fight) the bug, sales ____ (miss) their quarterly target.

6. It ____ (become) clear that the real bottleneck ____ (be) not the tool but the onboarding.

Exercise B — Fix the tense

Each customer-story line has ONE tense mistake. Rewrite it.

1. They tried three tools before, they came to us.

2. When we started, they were losing 20% of leads and had lost their biggest client the week before.

3. Sales were dropping fast, so we are running a pilot the next Monday.

4. By Q3, churn dropped from 6% to 2.4%.

Exercise C — Build a 3-sentence customer story

Use ONE past continuous (situation), ONE past simple (event), ONE past perfect (cause). Write 3 sentences.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Client: a mid-sized e-commerce brand. Problem: they were losing 15% of carts. Cause: their checkout had gone from 3 to 6 steps in a redesign. →

2. Client: a B2B SaaS. Problem: engineers drowning in support. Cause: same three ticket types over and over. →

Listening: A 3-minute customer story — retold three ways

Three sellers from the same company each tell the SAME customer story to a prospect. One tells it as a feature list, one as a testimonial, one as a proper before-how-after case study.

pre

Which version do you predict will land best?

What TWO things will make the strong version stronger than the other two?

gist

1. Who is the customer being talked about?

2. What was the core problem?

3. Which of the three sellers tells a proper case study?

detail

1. What TWO things does Voice A talk about that a prospect doesn't care about yet?

2. How does Voice B end the story?

3. What is Voice C's specific 'after' number?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Third listen — story craft

Focus on HOW each speaker builds (or fails to build) the story.

1. Voice A skips the 'before'. Why does that make the story flat, even though everything he says is technically true?

2. Voice B's version has emotion. Why is it still not a case study?

3. Voice C mixes narrative tenses on purpose. Find the past perfect line and explain what work it does.

Language from the audio — customer-story phrases

Match each phrase to what it DOES in the story.

"They were losing about 40 hours a week..." — opens with the pain, in numbers

"They had already tried two other tools." — past perfect — explains why the problem was still unsolved

"So we auto-routed the three ticket types..." — features expressed as verbs, not adjectives

"By week eight, it was down to nine hours." — measurable 'after' the prospect can benchmark against

"What that meant for the CFO was..." — translates outcome into buyer-language (money / risk)

"The interesting part is why nobody had spotted it." — hook that promises insight, keeps the prospect listening

Voice A: So, Northlake use our platform. It's fully enterprise-grade, obviously, with the AI-powered classification module, single sign-on, and our new analytics layer. They love the dashboards. Really strong rollout.

Voice B: Yeah — Northlake are amazing. The CEO actually said to us it was the best rollout he'd ever seen. Everyone in their head office is a fan. Genuinely, we get thank-you notes.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice C: Okay — Northlake, 80 stores. When they came to us, their head-office analysts were losing about 40 hours a week to the same three types of store-level report — literally the same three questions, over and over. They had already tried two other tools before us and neither one had solved it, because both had treated it as a data problem. We treated it as a routing problem — we auto-routed those three report types straight to the store managers who owned the answer. By week eight, that 40 hours a week was down to about nine. What that meant for the CFO was he freed up more than a full analyst headcount, without firing anyone. The interesting part is why nobody had spotted it: those three questions weren't in anyone's job description.

Speaking: solo role-play — tell YOUR customer story

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario. Record yourself (voice note, 2–3 min) telling the story as if to a prospect at a coffee break. You MUST hit before → how → after, use at least ONE past perfect line, and end with ONE measurable number. Play back and self-score.

Scene: A real customer of yours (recommended)

A: You are the seller.

B: Imagined listener: a lookalike prospect who has never heard of you.

Scene: A make-believe HR SaaS win

A: Customer: a 300-person tech company drowning in reference-check emails.

B: Imagined listener: a Head of People at a similar-sized company.

Scene: A freelance / consulting win

A: You are the freelancer.

B: Imagined listener: another prospective client with the exact same problem your last client had.

Extra speaking task — 30-second retell

Now retell the SAME story in 30 seconds, as if you have only one elevator ride. You must keep the pain-number and the outcome-number; everything else is negotiable. Record and compare with your 2-minute version — which one is stronger?

Writing mini-task

Turn your spoken customer story into a 90–110 word written case-study paragraph. Structure it in three sentences: Before (with number), How (features as verbs), After (with number). Add ONE line explaining WHY the problem had gone unsolved before you.

Wrap-up

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



One 'before' number from your work you'll start opening with.

One feature you'll stop describing as an adjective and start describing as a verb.

One story from your quarter that deserves the case-study treatment.

Quiz

1. A good customer story has three parts. They are...
 - (A) Product, price, plan
 - (B) Before, how, after
 - (C) Team, tool, timing
2. The single most common mistake sellers make is...
 - (A) Talking too fast
 - (B) Skipping the 'before' — the pain in numbers
 - (C) Using too many numbers
3. 'They had already tried two other tools before they called us' uses the past perfect to...
 - (A) Sound formal
 - (B) Explain why the problem was still unsolved
 - (C) Fill time
4. The 'after' in a proper case study must be...
 - (A) A quote of praise
 - (B) A measurable number the buyer would recognise as valuable
 - (C) The product roadmap
5. Features are best expressed as...
 - (A) Adjectives
 - (B) Verbs — actions we performed for the customer
 - (C) Bullet points on a slide

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Story vocabulary

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

Word bank: pain point · workaround · bottleneck · churn · root cause · friction

1. Their team's real ____ was that every export took 40 minutes and blocked reporting.

2. Prior to our involvement, their ____ was a Google Sheet manually copied and pasted every Monday.

3. The main ____ was in month two, when trial users had to re-enter their card details.

4. Their ____ dropped from 6% to 2.4% in one quarter.

5. The customer's most acute ____ was that reference checks consumed three full days.

6. We didn't just fix the symptom — we found the ____: a broken link in the onboarding email.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word executive summary of a successful project for a major client. Describe the situation before your intervention (using 'pain point' and 'bottleneck'), the solution you provided, and the measurable outcome (using 'churn' or 'friction').

id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Follow the Before-How-After structure.

Include specific (real or imagined) metrics.

Use past perfect for the 'Before' state.

model: Executive Summary: Northwind Logistics Optimization When we began our engagement with Northwind Logistics, their primary pain point was a manual data-entry process that had been in place for years. This created a massive bottleneck in their supply chain, delaying shipments by an average of 48 hours. The team had developed a complex workaround involving multiple spreadsheets, but this only increased the risk of error. We identified that the root cause was a lack of integration between their CRM and warehouse management system. By implementing our automated routing module, we removed the friction in the data flow. The results were immediate: shipping delays were eliminated within the first month. Most significantly, their customer churn rate dropped from 8% to 2.5% by the end of Q3. This project has not only saved thousands of manual hours but has also significantly improved their market reputation. We are now looking at scaling this solution to their European subsidiaries in the coming year.

Exercise 2 — Narrative tenses

Put the verb in brackets in the best narrative tense (past simple, past continuous, or past perfect).

1. When they signed with us, they ____ (already / try) two other tools.

2. Their analysts ____ (lose) about 40 hours a week to manual reporting at that point.

3. We ____ (run) a two-week pilot and churn ____ (drop) from 6% to 2.4%.

4. By Q3, cart abandonment ____ (fall) from 15% to 6%.

5. Sales ____ (drop) fast while engineering ____ (fight) a bug for three weeks.

6. It ____ (become) clear the real problem ____ (be) onboarding, not the tool.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 3 — Feature, benefit or outcome?

Which is it?

1. 'Auto-routing tickets by role, not keyword.'
(A) feature
(B) benefit
(C) outcome
2. 'Engineers get their weekends back.'
(A) feature
(B) benefit
(C) outcome
3. 'Support hours dropped from 40/week to 9/week.'
(A) feature
(B) benefit
(C) outcome
4. 'Single sign-on with our identity provider.'
(A) feature
(B) benefit
(C) outcome
5. 'A full analyst headcount freed up without firing anyone.'
(A) feature
(B) benefit
(C) outcome

Exercise 4 — Fix the flat story line

Each customer-story sentence is missing ONE key part (before / how / after / cause). Rewrite it in ONE stronger sentence.

1. We deployed our platform and the client was very happy with the features.

2. They had a lot of problems before, and now they don't.

3. Their CEO said we were amazing.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. It's an enterprise-grade, AI-driven, cloud-native solution.

Exercise 5 — Three sellers, one story

You'll hear three sellers tell the SAME customer story to a prospect. One is a feature list. One is a testimonial. One is a proper case study.

1. Which version is the proper before-how-after case study?

2. Which version is a testimonial?

3. Which version is a feature list?

Voice A: Voice 1: So, Northlake use our platform. Enterprise-grade, obviously, with the AI classification module and single sign-on. Really strong rollout, they love the dashboards.

Voice B: Voice 2: Northlake are amazing. Their CEO said it was the best rollout he'd ever seen. Genuinely, we get thank-you notes. Everyone in head office is a fan.

Voice C: Voice 3: Northlake, 80 stores. Their analysts were losing 40 hours a week to the same three report types. We auto-routed them to the store managers who owned the answer, and within eight weeks it was down to nine hours a week. Freed up more than a full analyst headcount, without firing anyone.

Exercise 6 — Write your own 90-word case study

Turn a real customer / project / client win from your work into a 90–110 word paragraph. Three sentences: Before (with number), How (features as verbs), After (with number). Add ONE past-perfect line explaining WHY the problem had gone unsolved before you.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: 3 sellers, 1 story

Think about the Northlake / Vellum case. Answer the questions.

1. What is the ONE change you'd force EVERY seller to make in their version of the story?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Rewrite the standardised 90-second version of the Northlake story.

3. What ONE monthly metric would you report to the founder to prove the story is landing better?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: what's missing?

1. no BEFORE — no pain to compare
2. no HOW — the middle is invisible
3. no CUSTOMER — feature list, not a story

Reading: Before / How / After

1. (B) Before, how, after
2. (B) Skipping the 'before' — the pain
3. (B) Verbs ('we auto-routed...')
4. (B) A testimonial, not a case study

Vocabulary: features, benefits and pain points

1. bottleneck
2. workaround
3. feature; benefit
4. root cause
5. friction
6. churn
1. The team's real bottleneck was that every export took 40 minutes.
2. Before us, their workaround was a Google Sheet copied and pasted every Monday.
3. Auto-routing tickets is a feature; getting weekends back is the benefit.
4. We didn't just fix the symptom — we found the root cause.
5. The chief source of friction emerged in month two.

Grammar focus: Narrative tenses for customer stories

1. had already tried
2. was losing / were losing
3. ran; dropped
4. had already cut
5. were fighting; missed / were missing
6. became; was
1. They had tried three tools before they came to us. (earlier past → past perfect)
2. Fine as written — this is the correct mix of past continuous + past perfect.
3. Sales were dropping fast, so we ran a pilot the following Monday. (narrative → past simple, not present)
4. By Q3, churn had dropped from 6% to 2.4%. ('by Q3' + earlier past → past perfect)
1. Model: 'They were losing about 15% of carts every week when they called us. We rebuilt the checkout in eight days and cart-abandonment dropped to 6%. It turned out their previous agency had added three extra steps that nobody had ever tested with real users.'
2. Model: 'Their engineering team was losing about 40 hours a week to support tickets when we started. We auto-routed the three ticket types that were eating most of that time, and by month two the number was down to nine. They had actually solved the same three tickets manually more than 400 times before anyone noticed the pattern.'

Listening: A 3-minute customer story — retold three ways

1. Northlake Retail — an 80-store fashion retailer.
2. They were losing about 40 hours of head-office analyst time every week to manual store-level reporting.
3. Voice C — she opens with the pain (40 hours/week), names the intervention (auto-routing the three ticket types), and closes with numbers (down to 9 hours/week within eight weeks).
1. The platform name and its 'enterprise-grade architecture' — features with no pain attached.
2. With a quote — 'The CEO said it was the best rollout he'd ever seen' — no numbers.
3. 40 hours/week → 9 hours/week within 8 weeks.
1. Because the listener has no baseline of pain to compare the result against — 'they use our platform' is not a change.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. It's a testimonial — a quote of praise with no measurable outcome. A prospect can't calculate their own ROI from it.
3. 'They had tried two other tools before they called us' — it explains WHY the problem was still unsolved and quietly positions our win against known alternatives.

Quiz

1. (B) Before, how, after
2. (B) Skipping the 'before' — the pain in numbers
3. (B) Explain why the problem was still unsolved
4. (B) A measurable number the buyer would recognise as valuable
5. (B) Verbs — actions we performed for the customer

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Story vocabulary

1. bottleneck
2. workaround
3. friction
4. churn
5. pain point
6. root cause

Exercise 2 — Narrative tenses

1. had already tried
2. were losing
3. ran; dropped
4. had fallen
5. were dropping / dropped; were fighting
6. became; was

Exercise 3 — Feature, benefit or outcome?

1. (A) feature
2. (B) benefit
3. (C) outcome
4. (A) feature
5. (C) outcome

Exercise 4 — Fix the flat story line

1. Model: 'They were losing about 40 hours of engineering time a week when we came in; we auto-routed the three ticket types that were eating most of that time, and by week eight they were down to nine hours.'
2. Model: 'Before us, they were leaking 15% of carts every week — mostly at the shipping step. We rebuilt the checkout in eight days and cart abandonment dropped to 6%.'
3. Model: 'Their CEO said it was the best rollout he'd ever seen — but the harder number is that support hours dropped from 40/week to 9/week within two months.'
4. Model: 'For Northlake specifically: auto-routing three report types to the store managers who owned the answer, freeing about 31 analyst hours a week.'

Exercise 5 — Three sellers, one story

1. Voice 3 — opens with the 40h/week pain, names the intervention (auto-routing), closes with the 9h/week number.
2. Voice 2 — quote of praise from the CEO, no measurable outcome.
3. Voice 1 — 'enterprise-grade platform, AI classification, single sign-on' — no customer, no change.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: 3 sellers, 1 story

1. Model: force every version to open with the 40h/week pain number. It's the single change that already correlates with a 23-point win-rate lift.
2. Model: 'Northlake — 80 stores. Their analysts were losing about 40 hours a week to the same three report types, and they had already tried two tools that treated it as a data problem. We treated it as a routing problem, auto-routed those three types to the store managers, and within eight weeks that 40 hours was down to nine. For their CFO, that freed up more than a full analyst headcount — without firing anyone.'
3. Model: win rate on calls where the '40 → 9' number was actually said (measured from call transcripts). Everything else is opinion.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 3 · B3B

Pitching with impact

Theme: *Selling & Storytelling*



Learning objectives

- Deliver a punchy value proposition to a decision-maker in under 60 seconds.
- Use adverbs and adverbial phrases to sharpen impact without inflating claims.
- Support a pitch with metrics that are specific, comparable and credible.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Ten-word pitch

Describe what you (or your team, or your last project) do in EXACTLY 10 words — no more, no fewer. Then rewrite it in exactly 6 words. Which version is stronger?

Start with WHO you help + WHAT changes for them.

Avoid the words 'solution', 'leverage', 'platform' and 'innovative'.

If a stranger heard your 6-word version, could they repeat it back?

If someone forwarded it in Slack, would it survive the copy-paste?

Lead-in: hit or miss?

Decide: HIT (specific, credible) or MISS (vague, forgettable).

1. 'We're an AI-powered next-gen platform empowering forward-thinking teams.'

2. 'We cut HR reference checks from three days to fifteen minutes.'

3. 'We help companies grow faster.'

followUp: Which HIT line is more re-tellable in a corridor?

Reading: What makes a pitch stick

Most pitches don't fail because the product is weak. They fail because the pitch itself is vague. 'We help companies grow faster' is technically true of every B2B company on earth, which means it tells the listener nothing. A sticky pitch does the opposite: it is uncomfortably specific.

There is a simple test. If the listener were asked to repeat your pitch back in the corridor thirty seconds later, would they get anything right? If your opening is 'AI-powered next-generation platform empowering forward-thinking teams', the honest answer is no — those are decoration words that carry no information. If your opening is 'We cut reference checks from three days to fifteen minutes', the answer is yes, because the listener now owns two comparable numbers and a specific job.

Adverbs matter here more than people think. 'Roughly', 'consistently', 'quietly', 'without exception' — these small words either sharpen a claim or inflate it. 'We consistently cut onboarding time by around 40%' is credible; 'We revolutionise onboarding across the industry' is not. Sharp adverbs signal a speaker who knows exactly how far their claim goes. Inflated ones signal a speaker who doesn't.

1. The most common reason pitches fail, according to the text, is...

- (A) The product is weak
- (B) The pitch itself is vague
- (C) The pricing is wrong

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. 'AI-powered next-generation platform empowering forward-thinking teams' is criticised because...
- (A) It's grammatically wrong
 - (B) The words are decoration and carry no information
 - (C) It's too short
3. The 'corridor test' asks whether...
- (A) The room clapped
 - (B) The listener can repeat your pitch back thirty seconds later
 - (C) The slides looked good
4. Adverbs like 'roughly' and 'consistently' are useful because they...
- (A) Sound British
 - (B) Sharpen a claim and show the speaker knows how far it goes
 - (C) Fill space

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

sticky (pitch) — memorable enough to be repeated

buzzword — an over-used word that no longer means anything specific

credible — believable given the evidence

inflated — made to sound bigger than it really is

hedge — soften a claim so it stays accurate

value proposition — the specific change you deliver for a specific buyer

Vocabulary: value props, metrics and adverbs

value proposition (VP) — a single, compelling statement of who benefits, what changes, and the evidence for it

positioning — the vantage point you occupy in the buyer's mental landscape relative to alternatives

differentiator — the singular attribute rivals cannot readily replicate

elevator pitch — 30–60 seconds; opening line + change + proof + ask

baseline — the benchmark figure against which subsequent improvement is measured

delta — the change from baseline to result

ROI — return on investment — $\text{value gained} \div \text{cost}$

conversion — % of prospects taking the next step

attribution — which action caused the result

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



roughly / approximately — signals honesty — you know the number isn't exact

consistently — not a one-off; it repeats

measurably — there is a number, not a feeling

quietly — understated confidence; often more credible

without exception — strong claim — only use if literally true

practice

Complete each pitch line with **ONE** word / phrase.

1. Our ____ isn't the AI; it's that we route by role, not by keyword.

2. Their established ____ was 6% monthly churn; our intervention brought it to 2.4% ____.

3. For every €1 they spent with us, they saved €7 in analyst time — a 7× ____.

4. We ____ cut onboarding by around 40% across the last six enterprise rollouts.

5. Trial-to-paid ____ went from 8% to 14% in the first quarter.

6. The founder didn't oversell — she said 'we ____ think it's worth a 30-day pilot'.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with **ONE** word/phrase from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. Our <u>attribute rivals cannot replicate</u> isn't the AI; it's that we route by role.

2. Their established <u>benchmark figure</u> was 6% monthly churn.

3. For every €1 they spent with us, they saved €7 in analyst time — a 7× <u>return on investment</u>.

4. We <u>repeatedly</u> cut onboarding by around 40% across the last six enterprise rollouts.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

5. The founder didn't oversell — she said 'we <u>with understated confidence</u> think it's worth a pilot'.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a feedback memo to a founder whose pitch is currently 'buzzword salad' and lacks specific metrics.

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: Feedback — Q4 Investor Pitch Deck. Your current opening line is a bit of a 'buzzword salad'; phrases like 'next-gen platform' are inflated and don't help the pitch stay sticky in a corridor. To make the value proposition more credible, we need to lead with a specific baseline and delta. For example, instead of saying we 'significantly enhance efficiency', we should say we 'consistently cut reference checks from three days to fifteen minutes'. This provides a measurable ROI that an investor can actually model. We should also quietly hedge our claims where necessary—using 'roughly' or 'approximately' often lands better than absolute certainty. If we can show that our trial-to-paid conversion is up 40% without exception across the last six cohorts, the attribution to our new differentiator becomes unmistakable. That's the ask: less decoration, more data.



Grammar focus: Adverbs and adverbial phrases

1. Adverbs of degree — how far does the claim go? — Use these to signal you know your own limits:

- roughly / approximately (~) — you're honest about margin of error
- consistently — not a one-off, but not always either
- measurably — there is a number
- without exception — very strong; only if literally true
- across every X we tested — hedged but strong

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Adverbs of manner — HOW you deliver the change — • quietly — understated, often more credible than 'loudly' • significantly — meaningful change, no specific number attached • immediately / eventually — puts the change in time • proactively / reactively — signals stance, not just outcome

3. Adverbial phrases — cheap way to sound specific — • within the first 30 days • in every rollout we've done • across the last six enterprise clients • with zero engineering effort • before Legal even had to get involved

4. Common trap — 'literally' means literally — 'Literally' is not for emphasis. 'We literally saved them a headcount' should only be used if you literally did. Otherwise use 'effectively' or 'in practical terms'.

Exercise A — Pick the sharper adverb

Choose the adverb / phrase that sharpens the claim without inflating it.

1. We cut onboarding by 40% (a) consistently (b) revolutionarily.

2. The tool paid for itself (a) within the first quarter (b) in the fullness of time.

3. We rolled it out (a) with zero engineering effort (b) seamlessly and holistically.

4. Churn dropped (a) significantly (b) totally to 2.4% across every cohort.

5. We (a) quietly (b) unashamedly outperform the incumbent on time-to-value.

Exercise B — Deflate the buzzword

Rewrite each inflated line using a sharper adverb or adverbial phrase.

1. We revolutionise the way enterprises deploy AI.

2. We literally save companies millions.

3. Our platform is transformational, next-generation and holistic.

4. We significantly enhance operational efficiency across the board.

Exercise C — Adverb build

Take the neutral sentence. Add ONE adverb of degree AND ONE adverbial phrase to sharpen it. Do NOT change the number.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. We cut onboarding time by 40%.

2. Trial-to-paid conversion went up.

3. Their support team stopped drowning in tickets.

Listening: three founders, sixty seconds each

You're on a panel judging three back-to-back 60-second pitches. Each founder is selling the same category (a workflow tool for HR teams) to the same buyer persona (a Head of People at a 500-person company).

pre

Which pitch do you predict will win — and what will win it?

What is ONE word / phrase you're allergic to hearing in these pitches?

gist

1. Which founder wins the panel, and why?

2. Which founder is the buzzword offender?

3. Which founder is the closest to good but still hedges too weakly?

detail

1. What is Voice B's baseline → delta number?

2. What is Voice B's specific ask?

3. What does Voice B say to disarm the buyer's likely objection?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Third listen — pitch craft

Focus on *HOW* each founder pitches. Answer from what they *DO*, not just what they say.

1. Voice B uses the adverbial phrase 'within the first 30 days' twice. What work does it do?

2. Voice A's pitch has more sentences than Voice B's, but less information. Why?

3. Voice C is technically credible but forgettable. What ONE change would you push her to make?

Language from the audio — high-impact pitch moves

Match each phrase to what it *DOES* in the pitch.

"We cut it from three days to fifteen minutes." — baseline → delta in one sentence

"Consistently, across the last six rollouts..." — adverb + adverbial phrase — sharpens without inflating

"Not a slide — a real button." — disarms the 'is this vapourware?' objection

"One team, one hiring manager, thirty days." — makes the ask tiny and reversible

"That's the ask." — closes cleanly — signals 'now it's your move'

"Quietly, we outperform on time-to-value." — understated adverb — often lands harder than 'obviously'

Voice A (Ken): So we're an AI-powered, next-generation talent platform empowering forward-thinking people teams to scale impact across the enterprise. We're transformational, holistic, and honestly changing the way work happens. That's us in a sentence.

Voice B (Marta): Heads of People spend three days per hire on reference checks — most of it chasing people who ghost them. We cut it from three days to fifteen minutes. Consistently, across the last six rollouts, that has also freed up about twelve hours a week of recruiter time per hundred open roles. The ask is small: one 30-day pilot on one team, one hiring manager, no engineering effort. Decide at the end. And you can turn it off in one click — that's a real button, not a slide. That's the ask.

Voice C (Sanya): We work with People teams on hiring workflows. Our customers have seen meaningful improvements in time-to-hire, better candidate experience, and stronger collaboration between recruiters and hiring managers. We'd love to explore whether there's a fit.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Speaking: solo role-play — 60-second pitch

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario. Record yourself (voice note, exactly 60 seconds) delivering the pitch to a specific decision-maker. You MUST include: (1) opening line with the specific buyer, (2) baseline → delta number, (3) at least ONE sharp adverb + ONE adverbial phrase, (4) a small, reversible ask. Play back and self-score.

Scene: Your real product / service (recommended)

A: You pitch.

B: Imagined listener: the exact decision-maker you'd meet at a conference dinner.

Scene: A freelance / consulting pitch

A: You pitch yourself as an outside expert.

B: Imagined listener: a director who has already tried two consultants.

Scene: An internal pitch

A: You pitch a project idea to your own leadership.

B: Imagined listener: your CEO, who cares about revenue and risk only.

Extra speaking task — 15-second version

*Now compress the SAME pitch to **15 seconds** — the elevator-just-closing version. You must keep one number and the ask. Everything else has to go. Record and compare with your 60-second version. Which one would you actually use at a conference?*

Writing mini-task

Write your value proposition in EXACTLY 3 sentences (max 45 words). Sentence 1: who + what changes. Sentence 2: proof (a baseline → delta number). Sentence 3: the small, reversible ask.

Wrap-up

One buzzword you'll retire this month.

One adverb ('quietly', 'consistently', 'measurably') you'll use in your next pitch.

One baseline → delta number from your work you'll practise saying out loud.

Quiz

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The 'corridor test' asks whether...
 - (A) The room clapped
 - (B) The listener can repeat your pitch 30 seconds later
 - (C) The slides looked good
2. Which line is SHARPER, not more inflated?
 - (A) 'We revolutionise onboarding.'
 - (B) 'We consistently cut onboarding by around 40%.'
 - (C) 'We literally change the game.'
3. A good value proposition has three parts...
 - (A) Slogan, logo, colour
 - (B) Who + what changes + how we know
 - (C) Product, price, place
4. 'Literally' is over-used because...
 - (A) It's slang
 - (B) It should only be used when you literally mean it
 - (C) It's American
5. The small, reversible ask matters because...
 - (A) It's polite
 - (B) It removes the buyer's risk and makes 'yes' cheap
 - (C) It fills time

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Pitch vocabulary

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

Word bank: differentiator · baseline · delta · ROI · conversion · quietly

1. Our ____ isn't the AI; it's that we route by role, not by keyword.

2. Their monthly churn ____ was 6%; we brought it to 2.4%.

3. That constitutes a ____ of 3.6 percentage points within a single quarter.

4. For every €1 invested with us, they recouped €7 — a 7× ____.

5. Trial-to-paid ____ went from 8% to 14% in the first quarter.

6. The founder didn't oversell — she ____ said it was worth a 30-day pilot.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a formal 150-word pitch to a potential investor or senior stakeholder. Focus on a specific product or service, emphasizing your unique 'differentiator' and providing clear 'baseline' and 'delta' metrics to prove impact.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Maintain a sharp, data-driven register.

Avoid buzzword inflation; use specific numbers.

Include a clear, reversible 'ask'.

model: Investment Pitch: Vellum AI Talent Discovery Current recruitment processes are broken. Heads of People are spending weeks on manual screening. Our key differentiator is our role-based routing engine, which outperforms keyword filters by 40% in accuracy. For our pilot client, the baseline time-to-hire was 45 days. Within the first quarter, we brought this down to 18 days — a delta of 27 days that saved the company roughly €120k in recruiter fees. We have quietly built a portfolio of six enterprise clients who have seen trial-to-paid conversion rates increase by 15% since integrating our API. The ROI for our customers is typically realized within the first 90 days. We are now seeking a €500k seed investment to scale our sales team. My ask is simple: a 20-minute follow-up call to walk you through our product roadmap. We are confident that our data-first approach represents the future of talent acquisition, and we would love for you to be part of that journey.

Exercise 2 — Sharp adverb, not inflated one

Choose the sharper adverb / adverbial phrase.

1. We cut onboarding by 40% ____.

2. The tool paid for itself ____.

3. We rolled it out ____.

4. Churn dropped ____ to 2.4% across every cohort.

5. We ____ outperform the incumbent on time-to-value.

6. ____ 30 days, they removed one full FTE of manual reporting.

Exercise 3 — HIT or MISS?

Which pitch opener HITS (specific + credible + memorable) and which MISSES?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'We're an AI-powered next-gen platform empowering forward-thinking teams.'
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
2. 'We cut reference checks from three days to fifteen minutes.'
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
3. 'We help companies grow faster.'
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
4. 'Last quarter we saved one retailer a full analyst headcount without firing anyone.'
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
5. 'We deliver best-in-class, transformational solutions across the enterprise.'
(A) HIT
(B) MISS

Exercise 4 — Deflate the buzzword

Rewrite each inflated line using a specific number, sharp adverb or adverbial phrase.

1. We revolutionise the way enterprises deploy AI.

2. We literally save companies millions.

3. Our platform is transformational, next-gen and holistic.

4. We significantly enhance operational efficiency across the board.

Exercise 5 — Three pitches on the panel

You'll hear three founders each give a 60-second pitch to the same investor panel. One offends with buzzwords, one is sharp, one is credible but forgettable.

1. Which pitch wins the panel — and why?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Which pitch is the buzzword offender?

3. Which pitch is credible but forgettable, and what ONE change would fix it?

Voice A: Speaker 1 (Ken): We're an AI-powered, next-generation talent platform empowering forward-thinking people teams to scale impact across the enterprise. Transformational, holistic, changing the way work happens.

Voice B: Speaker 2 (Marta): Heads of People spend three days per hire on reference checks. We cut it from three days to fifteen minutes. Consistently, across the last six rollouts, that has freed up twelve hours a week of recruiter time per hundred open roles. Ask: one 30-day pilot, one team, one hiring manager, no engineering effort. You can turn it off in one click — that's a real button, not a slide. That's the ask.

Voice C: Speaker 3 (Sanya): We work with People teams on hiring workflows. Our customers have seen meaningful improvements in time-to-hire, better candidate experience, and stronger collaboration between recruiters and hiring managers. We'd love to explore whether there's a fit.

Exercise 6 — Your value proposition in 3 sentences

Write your OWN value proposition in exactly 3 sentences, max 45 words. Sentence 1: who + what changes. Sentence 2: proof (baseline → delta with a number). Sentence 3: small reversible ask.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: the 3-founder panel

Reflect on the Peregrine case.

1. Which founder gets the majority of your coaching hours — and why?

2. Write the ONE-sentence coaching rule you'd pin at the top of every founder's slides.

3. Redraft the FIRST 15 seconds of Ken's pitch, without triggering him.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: hit or miss?

1. MISS — buzzword salad
2. HIT — clear change, comparable numbers
3. MISS — could describe any B2B

Reading: What makes a pitch stick

1. (B) The pitch itself is vague
2. (B) The words are decoration and carry no information
3. (B) The listener can repeat your pitch back thirty seconds later
4. (B) Sharpen a claim and show the speaker knows how far it goes

Vocabulary: value props, metrics and adverbs

1. differentiator
 2. baseline; consistently
 3. ROI
 4. consistently / measurably
 5. conversion
 6. quietly
1. Our differentiator isn't the AI; it's that we route by role.
 2. Their established baseline was 6% monthly churn.
 3. For every €1 they spent with us, they saved €7 in analyst time — a 7× ROI.
 4. We consistently cut onboarding by around 40% across the last six enterprise rollouts.
 5. The founder didn't oversell — she said 'we quietly think it's worth a pilot'.

Grammar focus: Adverbs and adverbial phrases

1. (a) consistently
 2. (a) within the first quarter
 3. (a) with zero engineering effort
 4. (a) significantly — dropped significantly to 2.4% across every cohort
 5. (a) quietly — 'unashamedly' inflates
1. Model: 'Across the last six enterprise rollouts, we consistently cut deployment time by about 40%.'
 2. Model: 'For the three enterprise clients on our public case-study page, we saved between €800k and €2.1m in the first year.'
 3. Model: 'Our platform quietly does one thing well — it routes tickets by role, not by keyword. That alone cut engineer time by roughly 40% for Northlake.'
 4. Model: 'Within the first 30 days, we typically remove one full FTE of manual reporting per 100 stores.'
1. Model: 'We consistently cut onboarding time by around 40%, across every enterprise rollout we've done in the last 12 months.'
 2. Model: 'Trial-to-paid conversion measurably went up — from 8% to 14% within the first quarter of us joining the team.'
 3. Model: 'Within eight weeks, their support team quietly stopped drowning in tickets — the same three request types were auto-routed to the people who actually owned the answer.'

Listening: three founders, sixty seconds each

1. Voice B (Marta). She opens with a specific pain-number, gives one metric with a baseline, and closes with an ask ('one 30-day pilot').
 2. Voice A (Ken) — 'AI-powered next-gen empowering forward-thinking teams' with no customer and no number.
 3. Voice C (Sanya) — good customer example, but she buries the number ('meaningful improvements') where 'from 3 days to 15 minutes' would have landed harder.
1. Reference checks: from 3 days to 15 minutes; and 12 hours/week of recruiter time freed up per 100 open roles.
 2. 'A 30-day pilot on one team, one hiring manager, no engineering effort — decide at the end.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. 'You can turn it off in one click. That's a real button, not a slide.'

1. It puts the change in time and makes the pilot feel low-risk and reversible — reduces the buyer's 'when will I know?' anxiety without inflating the claim.

2. Because most of Voice A's words are decoration ('empowering', 'next-gen', 'transformational') — they carry no specific claim, so density of information collapses.

3. Replace 'meaningful improvements in time-to-hire' with the actual number ('from 3 days to 15 minutes'). That single change would move her from testimonial to case-study level.

Quiz

1. (B) The listener can repeat your pitch 30 seconds later
2. (B) 'We consistently cut onboarding by around 40%.'
3. (B) Who + what changes + how we know
4. (B) It should only be used when you literally mean it
5. (B) It removes the buyer's risk and makes 'yes' cheap

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Pitch vocabulary

1. differentiator
2. baseline
3. delta
4. ROI
5. conversion
6. quietly

Exercise 2 — Sharp adverb, not inflated one

1. consistently (not 'revolutionarily')
2. within the first quarter (not 'in the fullness of time')
3. with zero engineering effort (not 'seamlessly and holistically')
4. significantly (not 'totally')
5. quietly (not 'unashamedly')
6. Within the first

Exercise 3 — HIT or MISS?

1. (B) MISS
2. (A) HIT
3. (B) MISS
4. (A) HIT
5. (B) MISS

Exercise 4 — Deflate the buzzword

1. Model: 'Across the last six enterprise rollouts, we consistently cut deployment time by about 40%.'
2. Model: 'For the three enterprise clients on our case-study page, we saved between €800k and €2.1m in the first year.'
3. Model: 'Our platform quietly does one thing well — it routes tickets by role, not by keyword. That alone cut engineer time by roughly 40% for Northlake.'
4. Model: 'Within the first 30 days, we typically remove one full FTE of manual reporting per 100 stores.'

Exercise 5 — Three pitches on the panel

1. Speaker 2 (Marta). Specific baseline → delta ('3 days to 15 minutes'), sharp adverbial phrase ('within the first 30 days'), and a small reversible ask ('one team, one hiring manager, 30 days').
2. Speaker 1 (Ken) — 'AI-powered next-gen empowering forward-thinking teams' with no customer and no number.
3. Speaker 3 (Sanya). She hedges the metric. Replace 'meaningful improvements in time-to-hire' with the actual number ('from 3 days to 15 minutes').

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: the 3-founder panel

1. Model: Sanya. Marta is already on target; Ken is defensive and low ROI on time. Sanya has the biggest gap between product strength and pitch strength — the highest-leverage founder to move.
2. Model: 'If an investor writes down anything from your first 15 seconds, it must be a number and a name — not an adjective.'
3. Model: 'Last quarter, we saved a 40-store retailer 12 hours a week per store manager — without them touching engineering. That's the promise. Here's how we did it.' — keep his energy, replace his opener.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 4 · B4A

Reading the numbers

Theme: Numbers & Trends



Learning objectives

- Walk a colleague through a forecast slide without hiding behind jargon.
- Use future perfect and future continuous to talk about projections in time.
- Read finance KPIs (ARR, churn, gross margin, runway) and translate them into plain English.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · One-number opener

Pick **ONE** number from your work you look at every week (a metric, a headcount, a budget line — anything). In 30 seconds out loud: (1) what the number is right now, (2) what it was 3 months ago, (3) where you expect it to be by year-end. Then record a 30-second voice note of the same three sentences.

Give the raw number **AND** the % change — one without the other is weaker.

Predict the year-end number in **ONE** sentence — no hedging like 'probably around, could be anywhere between'.

If you can't say the number out loud in one breath, it's not the right number to open with.

Bonus: what does the CFO care about, and does your number touch it?

Lead-in: sharp or fuzzy?

Decide: **SHARP** (specific, time-bound) or **FUZZY** (vague).

1. 'We'll probably grow quite a lot next year.'

2. 'By end of Q3 we'll have added 400 accounts — 12% above plan.'

3. 'ARR is looking really strong.'

followUp: Which SHARP line would a CFO write down?

Reading: The forecast that survives contact with reality

Most forecasts fail the moment they meet an actual quarter. Not because the maths was wrong, but because the story around the number was fuzzy. 'We'll probably grow quite a lot' is a hope, not a forecast. A useful forecast is boringly specific: it has a baseline (where we are), a delta (how much we'll move) and a date (by when).

The tenses matter here more than people realise. 'By the end of Q3, we'll have added 400 accounts' — that is future perfect, and it tells the listener that on a specific future date, the counting will be done. 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing on every enterprise deal' — that is future continuous, and it tells the listener what work will be in progress. Mix them up and you sound sloppy; use them well and even a hostile board room relaxes a little.

The other trick is to translate KPIs into English before you use them. ARR (annual recurring revenue) is 'the revenue we can count on for the next twelve months if nothing breaks'. Runway is 'how many months of cash we've got at today's burn rate'. Gross margin is 'what's left after we've paid the bill for actually delivering the service'. If you can't translate the acronym into a sentence a smart non-specialist would understand, do not put it on the slide.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The main reason forecasts fail is...
 - (A) Bad maths
 - (B) The story around the number is fuzzy
 - (C) Charts look ugly
2. A useful forecast must include...
 - (A) Baseline, delta and date
 - (B) Three colours minimum
 - (C) A quote from the CEO
3. 'By Q3 we'll have added 400 accounts' uses...
 - (A) Past perfect
 - (B) Future perfect
 - (C) Future continuous
4. 'Runway' means...
 - (A) A hiring pipeline
 - (B) How many months of cash you have at today's burn rate
 - (C) The path to IPO

Vocabulary in context

Match the finance term to a plain-English gloss.

ARR — revenue you can count on for the next 12 months if nothing breaks

runway — months of cash left at today's burn rate

gross margin — what's left after paying to deliver the service

burn rate — how much cash you spend per month, net

churn — % of customers who leave in a given period

baseline — the 'before' number we measure change against

Vocabulary: KPIs, chart language and forecast verbs

ARR / MRR — annual / monthly recurring revenue

gross margin — revenue minus cost of delivering the service, %

churn — % of customers or revenue lost in a period

CAC / LTV — cost to acquire a customer / lifetime value

runway — months of cash left at current burn

line chart — shows change over time — trend at a glance

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



bar chart — compares categories side by side

stacked bar — shows the mix inside each total

axis / label — the vertical / horizontal scale on a chart

outlier — the point that doesn't fit the pattern

project / forecast — predict a future number with a method

flat-line — stay at roughly the same level

outperform / undershoot plan — come in above / below the number we committed to

recalibrate (down / up) — change an earlier forecast

trajectory — the general direction, ignoring the noise

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. Our ____ went from 6% to 2.4% after we fixed onboarding — the best lever we pulled all year.

2. At the current spend, we've got about eleven months of ____.

3. One customer bought a five-year contract — that's an ____ we should note but not build the plan on.

4. Ignore the monthly noise; the ____ is clearly up and to the right.

5. We ____ the number down from €4m to €3.4m after losing the deal.

6. In enterprise SaaS, an 80% ____ is healthy; below 60% we should worry.

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. Our <u>% of customers who leave</u> went from 6% to 2.4% after we fixed onboarding.

2. At the current spend, we've got about eleven months of <u>cash left at today's burn rate</u>.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

3. One customer bought a five-year contract — that's a <u>data point that doesn't fit the pattern</u>.
4. Ignore the monthly noise; the <u>general direction</u> is clearly up and to the right.
5. We <u>changed our prediction</u> down from €4m to €3.4m after losing the deal.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a summary of the quarterly forecast for the board, distinguishing between the commit and the stretch numbers.

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: Q3 Revenue Forecast — Board Summary. Our current trajectory remains strong, and we project that by December, we'll have grown ARR from €4.2m to €5.6m. This 33% year-on-year delta is supported by a healthy 71% gross margin, which has recalibrated upwards following our infrastructure re-tender. While one December contract remains an outlier in the model, our baseline is solid. We have roughly 11 months of runway at the current burn rate, though this extends significantly if the Q4 tranche lands. On plan, we'll be running the new pricing across all segments by October, which should help us outperform our original churn targets. The commit number for the board is €5.4m, which accounts for some renewal risk in November; €5.6m remains the stretch goal. We will continue to monitor the burn closely to ensure we don't undershoot the plan if market conditions shift.



Grammar focus: Future perfect & future continuous

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Future perfect — 'by then, it will be done' — Form: will have + past participle. Use for something COMPLETED before a future point. • 'By the end of Q3, we'll have added 400 accounts.' • 'By December, we'll have paid off the credit line.' • 'By the time she joins, we'll have finished the migration.' Key word: BY (a point in time).

2. Future continuous — 'at that time, it'll be in progress' — Form: will be + -ing. Use for something HAPPENING AT a future moment. • 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing on every enterprise deal.' • 'While you're on holiday, I'll be covering the launch calls.' Key phrase: at that time / when X happens.

3. Common trap — future perfect vs will + past participle — 'We will have added 400 accounts by Q3' ■ | 'We will added 400 accounts by Q3' ✗ — you MUST include 'have'. In speech it often contracts to 'we'll've' — that's normal; write it out in slides.

4. Softening for forecasts — In finance we hedge without going fuzzy. Try: • 'We should have hit €4m by Q4' (softer than 'we will have hit') • 'We're likely to be running at 40% margin by then' • 'On plan, we'll have closed the round before the summer'

Exercise A — Choose the right future form

Underline the correct option.

1. By 2027, our team (will grow / will have grown) from 40 to about 90.

2. Don't call me at 3 — I (will present / will be presenting) the forecast to the board.

3. By the time you fly in, we (will finish / will have finished) the pitch deck.

4. This time next year, we (will run / will be running) the same product in three currencies.

5. By the end of the pilot, at least 80% of managers (will use / will have used) the tool at least once.

Exercise B — Rewrite the fuzzy forecast

Rewrite each hopeful, fuzzy line as a proper forecast using future perfect OR future continuous, with a baseline and a date.

1. We'll probably grow quite a lot next year.

2. The new pricing will hopefully be running everywhere soon.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. We'll have solved the churn thing at some point.

4. Marketing will do lots of stuff for the launch.

Exercise C — CFO translation

Turn each CFO-style statement into a plain-English forecast sentence a non-finance colleague would understand. Keep the number.

1. 'ARR to reach €5.6m by FY-end, +33% YoY, subject to no material churn events.'

2. 'Runway 11 months at current burn; extended to 16 with the planned €2m tranche.'

3. 'Gross margin trending from 62% to 71% by Q4 on infrastructure re-tender.'

Listening: three analysts, one forecast slide

You're the CFO. Three of your analysts have prepped 60 seconds each on the same forecast slide: ARR to €5.6m by year-end. You're deciding who presents to the board on Friday.

pre

Which analyst do you predict will win the slot — and what will win it?

What is ONE word / phrase you're allergic to hearing in a forecast?

gist

1. Which analyst wins the board slot, and why?

2. Which analyst hides behind acronyms?

3. Which analyst is technically correct but forgettable?

detail

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. What is Voice B's baseline → forecast number?

2. What risk does Voice B name out loud?

3. What does Voice B recommend the CFO actually take to the board?

Third listen — forecast craft

Focus on HOW each analyst forecasts. Answer from what they DO, not just what they say.

1. Voice B uses 'we'll have grown' twice in 60 seconds. What work does the tense do?

2. Voice A's forecast is more polished but less trusted. Why?

3. Voice C is technically right but doesn't get the slot. What ONE change would move her forward?

Language from the audio — high-impact forecast moves

Match each phrase to what it DOES in a forecast.

"By December, we'll have grown from 4.2 to 5.6." — future perfect + baseline → delta + date

"This time next quarter, we'll be running it on every enterprise deal." — future continuous — work in progress at a future point

"Two renewals in November worth about €200k are the risk." — names the downside case — earns the upside case

"So the number I'd take to the board is 5.4, not 5.6." — converts a forecast into a decision the CFO can use

"Ignore the monthly noise — the trend is clean." — distinguishes signal from noise

"That's the commit; 5.6 is the stretch." — separates promise from ambition

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice A (Tom): So the ARR trajectory is intact — we're seeing healthy NRR, GTM tailwinds in the mid-market segment, and top-of-funnel KPIs are firing. Modelled at 5.6, YoY, on plan. Really strong quarter incoming.

Voice B (Priya): Today we're at four-point-two million ARR. By December, on the current pipeline, we'll have grown to about five-point-six — that's 33% year-on-year. But there are two enterprise renewals in November worth about two hundred k combined, and one of them is genuinely wobbly. So the number I'd take to the board is five-point-four as the commit, and five-point-six as the stretch — never the other way round. Ignore the monthly noise; the trend is clean.

Voice C (Maya): So year-end forecast is five-point-six million ARR, up from four-point-two, which is roughly a 33% year-on-year growth rate. The model uses the current pipeline coverage. Any questions on methodology, happy to walk through.

Speaking: solo role-play — 60-second forecast

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario. Record yourself (voice note, exactly 60 seconds) delivering a forecast to a specific listener. You MUST include: (1) baseline → delta + date, (2) at least ONE future perfect AND ONE future continuous, (3) a named risk, (4) a 'commit vs stretch' line.

Scene: Your real number (recommended)

A: You forecast.

B: Imagined listener: your CFO or your director — the person who signs off on the plan.

Scene: A team-level project forecast

A: You forecast delivery.

B: Imagined listener: the head of engineering, who cares about slip risk.

Scene: A market forecast for a friend's startup

A: You forecast their year.

B: Imagined listener: a friend who is about to raise — cares about the story, not the model.

Extra speaking task — 20-second stretch/commit

Now compress the SAME forecast to 20 seconds. Two sentences only: (1) 'By X, we'll have Yd — that's the commit.' (2) 'If Z lands, we'll be closer to W — that's the stretch.' Record. Compare with the 60-second version. Which one would you actually send in a Slack DM to your CFO?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your forecast (max 55 words). Sentence 1: baseline → delta + date (future perfect). Sentence 2: what will be in progress by then (future continuous). Sentence 3: the ONE named risk + your commit-vs-stretch line.

Wrap-up

One KPI you'll stop dropping as an acronym and start translating.

One future-perfect line you'll actually use in your next update.

One risk you'll name out loud in your next forecast, not bury.

Quiz

1. A useful forecast has three parts. They are...
 - (A) Slogan, logo, colour
 - (B) Baseline, delta and date
 - (C) Story, feeling, hope
2. 'By Q3 we'll have added 400 accounts' uses...
 - (A) Future continuous
 - (B) Future perfect
 - (C) Past perfect
3. 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing' uses...
 - (A) Future perfect
 - (B) Future continuous
 - (C) Simple future
4. 'Runway' means...
 - (A) A hiring plan
 - (B) Months of cash left at today's burn
 - (C) The road to IPO
5. The analyst who wins the board slot is the one who...
 - (A) Uses the most acronyms
 - (B) Names the downside case out loud
 - (C) Has the biggest number

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — KPI vocabulary

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

Word bank: runway · churn · gross margin · ARR · burn rate · outlier

1. Our monthly ____ went from 6% to 2.4% after we rebuilt onboarding.

2. At the current spend, we've got about 11 months of ____.

3. Our ____ is now €4.2m — that's the revenue we can count on for the next 12 months.

4. Ignore the December week — it's an ____, one enterprise contract closed early.

5. Our ____ is €280k/month, net of revenue.

6. An 80% ____ is healthy in enterprise SaaS.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word quarterly financial update for your company's board of directors. You must use the unit's KPI vocabulary to explain the current state of the business, mentioning 'runway', 'burn rate', and 'ARR' specifically.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use at least 5 target vocabulary items.

Use future perfect and future continuous correctly.

Maintain a transparent, data-driven tone.

Clearly distinguish between 'commit' and 'stretch' goals.

model: Quarterly Financial Update – Q3 I am pleased to report that our ARR has reached €4.5m, representing a 20% increase over the previous quarter. While we saw a slight spike in churn in August, we have identified this as an outlier caused by a single large contract cancellation. Our current gross margin remains healthy at 78%, allowing us to maintain a stable burn rate of €200k per month. Consequently, we will have secured 14 months of runway by the end of the year. By December, we will have added three more enterprise accounts to our portfolio. During Q4, we will be focusing on our expansion into the DACH region. Our commit goal for year-end ARR is €5.2m, with a stretch goal of €5.5m if the current pipeline converts as expected. The primary risk remains the lengthening sales cycles in the enterprise segment. We will continue to monitor our metrics closely and adjust our spend accordingly to protect our cash position.

Exercise 2 — Future perfect or future continuous?

Put the verb in brackets in the best future form (future perfect OR future continuous).

1. By December, we ____ (add) about 400 paying accounts.

2. Don't call me at 3 — I ____ (present) the forecast to the board.

3. By the time she joins, we ____ (finish) the migration.

4. This time next year, we ____ (run) the same product in three currencies.

5. By the end of the pilot, at least 80% of managers ____ (use) the tool at least once.

6. While you're on holiday, I ____ (cover) the launch calls.

Exercise 3 — Sharp or fuzzy?

Which forecast is SHARP (baseline + delta + date) and which is FUZZY?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'We'll probably grow quite a lot next year.'
(A) SHARP
(B) FUZZY
2. 'By the end of Q3, we'll have added 400 accounts — 12% above plan.'
(A) SHARP
(B) FUZZY
3. 'ARR is looking really strong.'
(A) SHARP
(B) FUZZY
4. 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing on every enterprise deal.'
(A) SHARP
(B) FUZZY
5. 'Revenue will probably increase in the future.'
(A) SHARP
(B) FUZZY

Exercise 4 — Fix the fuzzy forecast

Each forecast is missing baseline / delta / date. Rewrite it in ONE stronger sentence.

1. We'll probably grow quite a lot next year.

2. The new pricing will be running everywhere soon.

3. We'll have solved churn at some point.

4. Marketing will do lots of stuff for the launch.

Exercise 5 — Three analysts, one slide

You'll hear three analysts present the same forecast slide (ARR to €5.6m by year-end).

1. Which analyst wins the board slot?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Which analyst hides behind acronyms?

3. Which analyst is technically right but forgettable?

Voice A (Tom): So the ARR trajectory is intact — healthy NRR, GTM tailwinds in the mid-market. Modelled at 5.6, YoY, on plan.

Voice B (Priya): Today four-point-two ARR. By December, we'll have grown to about five-point-six — 33% year-on-year. Two November renewals worth about two hundred k are the risk. So the number I'd take to the board is five-point-four as the commit, five-point-six as the stretch.

Voice C (Maya): Year-end forecast is five-point-six ARR, up from four-point-two, roughly 33% year-on-year. Model uses current pipeline coverage.

Exercise 6 — Write your 3-sentence forecast

Turn a real number from your work into a 3-sentence forecast (max 55 words). Sentence 1: baseline → delta + date (future perfect). Sentence 2: what will be in progress (future continuous). Sentence 3: named risk + commit vs stretch.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: sharp or fuzzy?

1. FUZZY — no baseline, no date
2. SHARP — baseline + delta + date
3. FUZZY — 'strong' is a feeling

Reading: The forecast that survives contact with reality

1. (B) The story around the number is fuzzy
2. (A) Baseline, delta and date
3. (B) Future perfect
4. (B) How many months of cash you have at today's burn rate

Vocabulary: KPIs, chart language and forecast verbs

1. churn
 2. runway
 3. outlier
 4. trajectory
 5. recalibrated
 6. gross margin
1. Our churn went from 6% to 2.4% after we fixed onboarding.
 2. At the current spend, we've got about eleven months of runway.
 3. One customer bought a five-year contract — that's an outlier.
 4. Ignore the monthly noise; the trajectory is clearly up and to the right.
 5. We recalibrated the number down from €4m to €3.4m after losing the deal.

Grammar focus: Future perfect & future continuous

1. will have grown
 2. will be presenting
 3. will have finished
 4. will be running
 5. will have used
1. Model: 'By December, we'll have grown ARR from €4.2m to about €5.6m — roughly 33%.'
 2. Model: 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing on every enterprise deal that closes.'
 3. Model: 'By the end of Q2, we'll have brought monthly churn back below 3%.'
 4. Model: 'From the 3rd to the 24th, marketing will be running paid campaigns in five markets while sales calls the top-100 accounts.'
1. Model: 'By December, we'll have grown recurring revenue from €4.2m to about €5.6m — 33% up on last year, assuming no big customer walks out.'
 2. Model: 'At today's spend, we've got 11 months of cash. If the €2m tranche lands as planned, we'll have 16.'
 3. Model: 'By Q4, we'll have taken gross margin from 62% to 71% — mostly because the new infra contract is a lot cheaper.'

Listening: three analysts, one forecast slide

1. Voice B (Priya). She opens with baseline → delta, names the risk out loud, and closes with 'so the number I'd take to the board is €5.4m, not €5.6m'.
 2. Voice A (Tom) — 'ARR trajectory, NRR compression, GTM tailwinds' with no plain-English translation.
 3. Voice C (Maya) — correct number, no story, no risk, no CFO-usable line.
1. ARR: from €4.2m today to €5.6m by December — +33% YoY.
 2. Two enterprise renewals in November worth about €200k — if either walks, land closer to €5.4m.
 3. €5.4m as the commit number; €5.6m as the stretch — never the reverse.
1. Future perfect ties the growth to a specific date (December). It converts a mood ('we're growing') into a commitment ('by X, the number will be Y').
 2. Because he never translates the acronyms. If the room can't hear the number they'd write down, they mentally file it as 'not for me'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Name the risk out loud. A forecast without a downside case reads as marketing; a forecast with a €200k renewal risk reads as an analyst.

Quiz

1. (B) Baseline, delta and date
2. (B) Future perfect
3. (B) Future continuous
4. (B) Months of cash left at today's burn
5. (B) Names the downside case out loud

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — KPI vocabulary

1. churn
2. runway
3. ARR
4. outlier
5. burn rate
6. gross margin

Exercise 2 — Future perfect or future continuous?

1. will have added
2. will be presenting
3. will have finished
4. will be running
5. will have used
6. will be covering

Exercise 3 — Sharp or fuzzy?

1. (B) FUZZY
2. (A) SHARP
3. (B) FUZZY
4. (A) SHARP
5. (B) FUZZY

Exercise 4 — Fix the fuzzy forecast

1. Model: 'By December, we'll have grown ARR from €4.2m to about €5.6m — roughly 33%.'
2. Model: 'This time next quarter, we'll be running the new pricing on every enterprise deal that closes.'
3. Model: 'By the end of Q2, we'll have brought monthly churn back below 3%.'
4. Model: 'From the 3rd to the 24th, marketing will be running paid campaigns in five markets while sales calls the top-100 accounts.'

Exercise 5 — Three analysts, one slide

1. Voice B (Priya) — names the number, names the risk, gives a commit-vs-stretch line.
2. Voice A (Tom) — ARR / NRR / GTM with no plain-English translation.
3. Voice C (Maya) — correct number, no story, no risk.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 4 · B4B

Describing trends

Theme: Numbers & Trends



Learning objectives

- Describe a chart clearly in under 90 seconds — the shape, the story, the ask.
- Use zero, first and second conditionals to talk about forecasts and levers.
- Use collocations with grow, fall, plateau and rebound to sound native — not translated.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Draw the shape

On a scrap of paper (or a napkin), sketch — in 60 seconds — the shape of ONE number from your work over the last 12 months. No axis labels. Then out loud: describe the shape in 3 sentences without using the word 'good' or 'bad'.

Name the SHAPE first (climb / plateau / dip / spike / rebound), then the numbers.

Say WHERE the inflection point is ('it broke in March...').

Say WHY, in one sentence, or say 'we don't know why yet'.

If you catch yourself saying 'it's been quite good overall', start again.

Lead-in: name the shape

Match each chart shape to the collocation.

1. Line rises steadily every month.

2. Line rockets from 100 to 900, then holds.

3. Line drops sharply, then climbs back.

4. One month sits far above the rest.

followUp: Which shape matches a number in YOUR work right now?

Reading: The chart-walkthrough that lands

A chart is not a decoration. It is a sentence with a picture attached. If the picture and the sentence say different things, the room stops trusting you. So the trick to walking someone through a chart is to say the sentence FIRST, in plain English, before you point at anything.

Try this shape: 'The story is this — X grew by Y between month A and month B, then plateaued when we changed Z. If we hold the current spend, we'll flat-line at this level. If we double the ad budget, based on the last two campaigns, we'll grow another 12–15%. That's the ask.' Notice the conditionals doing the work: zero and first conditionals for the levers ('if we hold X, we get Y'), turning the chart from a picture into a decision.

One collocation trap: 'the numbers went up a lot'. That is a translation, not a description. In English, numbers GROW, RISE, CLIMB, SURGE, SPIKE, DOUBLE, TRIPLE — and they FALL, DROP, DIP, SLIDE, SLUMP, PLUNGE. They can PLATEAU, FLAT-LINE, HOLD STEADY, or REBOUND. Use those verbs and the shape appears in the listener's head; use 'go up a lot' and it stays a fuzzy blob.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The main job of a chart in a business meeting is to...
 - (A) Look nice
 - (B) Support a specific plain-English sentence
 - (C) Prove you can use Excel
2. The 'ask' in a chart-walkthrough is...
 - (A) A question you ask the room
 - (B) The decision you want the room to make
 - (C) The chart title
3. 'If we double the ad budget, we'll grow another 12–15%.' — which conditional?
 - (A) Zero
 - (B) First
 - (C) Second
4. 'The numbers went up a lot' is criticised because...
 - (A) It's grammatically wrong
 - (B) It's a fuzzy translation — the shape doesn't appear in the listener's head
 - (C) It's too formal

Vocabulary in context — trend collocations

Match the verb / phrase to the shape it describes.

surge — rise very fast and steeply

plateau — flatten and stay at roughly the same level

rebound — fall and then recover to (near) the previous level

slump — fall sharply and stay down for a while

flat-line — show no meaningful change over time

double / triple — grow by 100% / 200%

Vocabulary: verbs of change, shapes and hedges

trend upward / ascend — generic 'up'

climb steadily — slow, consistent up

surge / spike — fast, steep up (spike suggests short-lived)

double / triple — grow by exactly 100% / 200%

rebound / recover — return towards the previous level after a fall

trend downward / decline — generic 'down'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



slide / slip — small, gradual down

plunge / plummet — fast, steep down

slump — drop sharply and stay down

halve — fall by exactly 50%

plateau / flat-line — stop changing meaningfully

hold steady — stay at the current level on purpose

fluctuate — move up and down without a clear direction

seasonal pattern — predictable annual peaks and troughs

outlier — the data point that doesn't fit

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase from the pool above.

1. Sign-ups ____ in the first week of the campaign — from 200 a day to almost 900.

2. Cancellations ____ steadily every month between April and August.

3. Revenue ____ in Q1 after the outage, then ____ once the fixes shipped.

4. Web traffic ____ around a level of 40k sessions/week for the whole quarter.

5. Ignore the Black Friday week — it's an ____.

6. Our headcount has ____ from 20 to 40 in twelve months.

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. Sign-ups <u>went up very fast and steeply</u> in the first week of the campaign.

2. Cancellations <u>went up slowly and consistently</u> every month between April and August.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Revenue <u>fell sharply and stayed down</u> after the outage, then recovered once the fixes shipped.

4. Web traffic <u>stopped changing meaningfully</u> around 40k sessions/week for the whole quarter.

5. Ignore the Black Friday week — it's <u>a data point that doesn't fit the pattern</u>.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Draft a two-paragraph memo to the CEO explaining last quarter's revenue trend chart and recommending a specific investment lever.

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: Q3 Revenue Trend — Recommendation The story is this: monthly revenue climbed steadily from €3.1m to €4.0m between April and July, then plateaued once we paused the ad campaign. One December week spiked to €5.2m, but that's an outlier — a single enterprise contract closed early — and shouldn't shape our forecast. If we hold current spend, we'll flat-line around €4.0m through year-end. If we doubled the ad budget, based on the last two campaigns, we'd likely grow another 12–15%, though returns may diminish. My recommendation: reinstate the campaign at 1.5× the prior budget for Q4, targeting a rebound to €4.6m by December, and review weekly to catch any slump early.



Grammar focus: Conditionals for forecasting

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



- 1. Zero conditional — general truth / rule of the business** — Form: If + present, present. Use for things that always happen in your business. • 'If we cut ad spend by 20%, sign-ups drop about 15% within two weeks.' • 'If churn goes above 5%, ARR growth flat-lines regardless of new sales.'
- 2. First conditional — real, likely future** — Form: If + present, will / going to + verb. Use for realistic forecasts and levers. • 'If we hold the current spend, we'll flat-line at €5.4m.' • 'If the November renewal closes, we're going to beat plan.' • Softer: 'we should / we're likely to / on plan we'll'.
- 3. Second conditional — hypothetical / less likely** — Form: If + past simple, would + verb. Use for 'what if' scenarios you don't fully believe in. • 'If we doubled the ad budget tomorrow, we'd probably grow another 15% — but I wouldn't recommend it.' • 'If churn halved, we'd hit €7m without touching sales.'
- 4. Common trap — 'will' inside the if-clause** — 'If we will grow, we hire' ✗ — never use will after IF (in first conditional). Say 'If we grow, we'll hire.' The FUTURE lives in the main clause, not the if-clause.

Exercise A — Zero, first or second?

Choose the best conditional for each situation.

1. A general rule: cutting ad spend 20% → sign-ups down ~15% within 2 weeks.

2. A realistic Q4 plan: if the pipeline holds, we beat plan.

3. A hypothetical: if the market crashed tomorrow, what would we do?

4. A lever you don't recommend: doubling ad budget tomorrow → +15%, but risky.

Exercise B — Fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE grammar error. Rewrite it.

1. If we will grow 20%, we hire two more engineers.

2. If we cut prices, sign-ups going up.

3. If we would double the ad budget, we would grow 15%.

4. If the November deal closes, we would beat plan.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise C — Chart-and-lever

For each chart situation, write *ONE* first-conditional sentence (the base case) *AND ONE* second-conditional sentence (a lever you're *NOT* pulling).

1. ARR is flat-lining at €4.2m. Base case = do nothing. Lever = re-price the top 20 accounts.

2. Churn is climbing from 3% to 4.5%. Base case = keep the current onboarding. Lever = rebuild onboarding.

3. Demo bookings surged 40% after the podcast. Base case = same podcast cadence. Lever = triple podcast spend.

Listening: three chart-walkthroughs

Three managers walk you through the same chart: churn climbing from 3% to 4.5% over six months. You have to pick *ONE* to present to the CEO on Monday.

pre

Which manager do you predict will win the slot — and what will win it?

What is *ONE* phrase you're allergic to hearing in a chart-walkthrough?

gist

1. Which manager wins the slot, and why?

2. Which manager buries the story in adjectives?

3. Which manager is fluent but overcommits?

detail

1. What is Voice B's exact baseline → current number?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. What conditional does Voice B use for the ask?

3. What second-conditional lever does Voice B mention but NOT recommend?

Third listen — chart craft

Focus on HOW each manager walks the chart. Answer from what they DO, not just what they say.

1. Voice B says the sentence BEFORE pointing at the chart. What work does that order do?

2. Voice A never names the SHAPE. What effect does that have?

3. Voice C promises 'under 2%'. Why does that hurt his credibility, not help it?

Language from the audio — chart-walkthrough moves

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"The story is this — churn climbed from 3 to 4.5 over six months." — sentence first, chart second — punchline before picture

"If we fund the onboarding rebuild, we'll bring it back under 3%." — first conditional — realistic lever + likely outcome

"If we halved prices tomorrow, we'd stop the bleeding — but we'd gut the margin." — second conditional — hypothetical lever we're NOT pulling

"Ignore the December spike — it's an outlier, one enterprise contract ended." — distinguishes signal from noise

"That's the ask: one engineer full-time for six weeks." — converts a chart into a decision the room can make

"Under 2% is the stretch, not the commit." — separates promise from ambition

Voice A (Priya): So what you're seeing here is a concerning trajectory. Frankly, the meaningful degradation over the trailing six-month window represents non-trivial exposure, particularly in the mid-market cohort. It's a trend we're watching closely and I'd like to open it up for discussion.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice B (Rafael): The story is this — monthly churn climbed steadily from 3.0 to 4.5% over six months. That's about 50% up. It started when we deprecated the old onboarding in March; it hasn't recovered. If we fund the onboarding rebuild — one engineer, six weeks — we'll bring it back under 3% by year-end. If we halved prices tomorrow, we'd stop the bleeding, but we'd also gut the margin. So the ask is the engineer, not the price cut. Under 2% is the stretch, not the commit. Ignore the December spike — it's an outlier, one enterprise contract ended.

Voice C (Danny): Yeah, so churn's up, but honestly I'm confident. We've got a bunch of ideas — better onboarding, better pricing, we're brainstorming a lot of stuff. Give us the quarter and we'll definitely bring it back under 2%, no question.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second chart-walkthrough

Solo task. Pick ONE chart from your real work (or the flat-line / spike / rebound examples from lead-in). Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) walking the chart. You MUST include: (1) the SHAPE named in one word, (2) baseline → current + when, (3) one first-conditional (base case + lever), (4) one second-conditional (lever you're NOT pulling), (5) a one-sentence ask.

Scene: Your real chart (recommended)

A: You walk it.

B: Imagined listener: your CEO, who has 90 seconds.

Scene: Sales pipeline chart

A: Walk a hypothetical Q3 pipeline that dipped in June and rebounded in August.

B: Imagined listener: the CRO, who cares about the number by Sept 30.

Scene: Customer NPS chart

A: Walk a hypothetical NPS that plateaued at 32 for six months.

B: Imagined listener: the Head of Product, who wants to know which lever moves it.

Extra speaking task — 30-second Slack-DM version

Now compress the SAME chart-walkthrough into a 30-second voice note — the version you'd send your boss in Slack on a Sunday. Three sentences only: shape, story, ask. Record and compare. Which one would you actually send?

Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your chart-walkthrough (max 55 words). Sentence 1: shape + baseline → current. Sentence 2: first-conditional (base case, no action). Sentence 3: first-conditional ask (the lever you WOULD pull + expected outcome).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Wrap-up

One trend verb (surge, plateau, rebound...) you'll use in your next chart-walkthrough instead of 'went up'.

One first-conditional line you'll actually say in your next update.

One 'stretch vs commit' distinction you'll make explicit next time.

Quiz

1. A good chart-walkthrough starts with...
 - (A) The methodology
 - (B) A plain-English sentence — punchline before picture
 - (C) An apology
2. 'If we cut ad spend by 20%, sign-ups drop 15%.' — which conditional?
 - (A) Zero
 - (B) First
 - (C) Second
3. 'If we doubled the ad budget tomorrow, we'd grow 15%.' — which conditional?
 - (A) First
 - (B) Second
 - (C) Third
4. The trap 'If we will grow, we hire' is wrong because...
 - (A) 'will' cannot follow IF in a first conditional
 - (B) 'hire' should be past
 - (C) It should be 'were'
5. The manager who wins the CEO slot...
 - (A) Uses the most acronyms
 - (B) Names shape, story and ask
 - (C) Promises the lowest number

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Trend collocations

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

Word bank: spiked · plateaued · rebounded · slumped · doubled · outlier

1. Sign-ups ____ in the first week of the campaign — from 200 a day to almost 900.

2. Web traffic ____ at around 40k sessions/week for the whole quarter.

3. Revenue ____ in Q1 after the outage, then ____ once the fixes shipped.

4. Our headcount has ____ from 20 to 40 in twelve months.

5. Ignore the Black Friday week — it's an ____.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word report analyzing a recent trend in your industry or company performance. Use the unit's trend vocabulary to describe the 'shape' of the data on a chart, and use conditionals (zero, first, or second) to discuss future implications.

id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use at least two different types of conditional sentences.

Describe chart shapes clearly (e.g., 'spiked then plateaued').

Conclude with a clear strategic recommendation.

model: Market Performance Analysis: Q2-Q3 Our user engagement metrics have shown significant volatility over the last six months. In April, daily active users spiked following the launch of our mobile app, but engagement plateaued throughout May as we reached the limit of our initial marketing reach. Unfortunately, during the June server outage, our traffic slumped by 30%. However, I am pleased to see that numbers have rebounded strongly in July, nearly reaching our April highs. Our sign-up rate has doubled compared to this time last year, though the final week of August remains an outlier due to a viral social media mention. If we maintain this momentum, we will beat our annual target by 15%. However, if we were to ignore the current retention data, we would risk a high churn rate in Q4. My recommendation is to focus on stabilizing the user experience. If we invest in infrastructure now, we will ensure long-term stability and growth.

Exercise 2 — Zero, first or second?

Choose the best conditional and complete the sentence.

1. General rule: if we ____ (cut) ad spend 20%, sign-ups ____ (drop) about 15%.

2. Realistic plan: if the November renewal ____ (close), we ____ (beat) plan.

3. Hypothetical: if the market ____ (crash) tomorrow, we ____ (freeze) hiring.

4. Realistic: if we ____ (hold) the current spend, we ____ (flat-line) at €5.4m.

5. Hypothetical: if churn ____ (halve), we ____ (hit) €7m without touching sales.

Exercise 3 — Fix the grammar

Each sentence has ONE conditional error. Rewrite it.

1. If we will grow 20%, we hire two more engineers.

2. If we cut prices, sign-ups going up.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. If we would double the ad budget, we would grow 15%.

4. If the November deal closes, we would beat plan.

Exercise 4 — Chart shape ↔ verb

Match each chart shape to its most natural verb.

Line rises very steeply for one month, then holds. — spiked, then plateaued

Line drops sharply, then climbs back to previous level. — fell, then rebounded

Line stays at roughly the same level for six months. — flat-lined

Line rises slowly and consistently every month. — climbed steadily

Line falls fast and stays down. — slumped

Line grows from 20 to 40. — doubled

Exercise 5 — Three chart-walkthroughs

You'll hear three managers walk the same chart (monthly churn: 3.0% → 4.5% over six months).

1. Which manager wins the CEO slot?

2. Which manager buries the story in adjectives?

3. Which manager overcommits without evidence?

Voice A (Priya): So what you're seeing is a concerning trajectory. Meaningful degradation over the trailing six-month window represents non-trivial exposure, particularly in mid-market.

Voice B (Rafael): The story is this — monthly churn climbed steadily from 3.0 to 4.5% over six months. It started when we deprecated the old onboarding in March. If we fund the onboarding rebuild — one engineer, six weeks — we'll bring it back under 3% by year-end. If we halved prices tomorrow, we'd stop the bleeding, but we'd gut the margin. So the ask is the engineer, not the price cut.

Voice C (Danny): Yeah, churn's up but I'm confident. Better onboarding, better pricing, we're brainstorming. Give us the quarter and we'll definitely bring it back under 2%.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 6 — Write a 3-sentence chart-walkthrough

Pick a real chart from your work. In 3 sentences (max 55 words): (1) shape + baseline → current, (2) first-conditional base case (no action), (3) first-conditional ask (the lever you'd pull + expected outcome).

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: The board deck

Think about the Meridian Analytics case. Answer the questions.

1. What is the ONE change you'd force the CEO to make in her opening 15 seconds?

2. Design the ONE slide the CEO will keep coming back to when the board asks 'what happens if it's wrong?'

3. What ONE-sentence coaching rule would you pin to the top of every finance slide from now on?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: name the shape

1. grew steadily
2. spiked, then plateaued
3. fell sharply, then rebounded
4. there's a clear outlier

Reading: The chart-walkthrough that lands

1. (B) Support a specific plain-English sentence
2. (B) The decision you want the room to make
3. (B) First
4. (B) It's a fuzzy translation — the shape doesn't appear in the listener's head

Vocabulary: verbs of change, shapes and hedges

1. spiked
 2. climbed
 3. slumped; rebounded
 4. plateaued / flat-lined
 5. outlier
 6. doubled
1. Sign-ups surged in the first week of the campaign.
 2. Cancellations climbed steadily every month between April and August.
 3. Revenue slumped after the outage, then rebounded once the fixes shipped.
 4. Web traffic plateaued around 40k sessions/week for the whole quarter.
 5. Ignore the Black Friday week — it's an outlier.

Grammar focus: Conditionals for forecasting

1. Zero — 'If we cut ad spend by 20%, sign-ups drop about 15%.'
 2. First — 'If the pipeline holds, we'll beat plan.'
 3. Second — 'If the market crashed tomorrow, we'd freeze hiring and extend runway to 18 months.'
 4. Second — 'If we doubled the ad budget tomorrow, we'd probably grow another 15% — but I wouldn't recommend it.'
1. 'If we grow 20%, we'll hire two more engineers.' (No 'will' in the if-clause.)
 2. 'If we cut prices, sign-ups go up.' (Zero conditional: both present.)
 3. 'If we doubled the ad budget, we'd grow 15%.' (No 'would' in the if-clause.)
 4. 'If the November deal closes, we'll beat plan.' (Realistic → first conditional.)
1. Model: 'If we do nothing, we'll flat-line at €4.2m through year-end. If we re-priced the top 20 accounts, we'd add roughly €400k of ARR — but we'd probably lose two of them in the process.'
 2. Model: 'If we keep the current onboarding, churn will keep climbing — probably to 5.5% by Q4. If we rebuilt onboarding in the next six weeks, we'd bring it back under 3% by year-end — but it costs one engineer full-time.'
 3. Model: 'If we hold the current podcast cadence, we'll keep this 40% lift through Q4. If we tripled podcast spend tomorrow, we'd probably see diminishing returns — the last cohort already came in at CAC 1.4× the target.'

Listening: three chart-walkthroughs

1. Voice B (Rafael). Names the shape ('climbed steadily'), gives the story (post-onboarding rebuild), and closes with a clear first-conditional ask ('if we fund the onboarding rebuild, we'll bring it back under 3%').
 2. Voice A (Priya) — 'concerning trajectory, meaningful degradation, non-trivial exposure' with no shape word and no ask.
 3. Voice C (Danny) — 'we'll definitely bring it back under 2%' — no evidence, no lever named, no risk case.
1. Monthly churn: 3.0% → 4.5% over six months — about 50% up.
 2. First conditional — 'If we fund the onboarding rebuild, we'll bring it back under 3% by year-end.'
 3. 'If we halved prices tomorrow, we'd stop the bleeding — but we'd also gut the margin.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. It gives the room the punchline first — the chart then confirms it, instead of being decoded. Listener trust goes up because they don't feel tested.
2. The listener has to reconstruct it themselves. Half the room reconstructs it wrong, and the manager has lost them without noticing.
3. It's overcommitting without evidence. A single unbacked promise poisons the next three real ones. Better: 'if we fund X, we'll bring it back under 3% — under 2% is the stretch, not the commit.'

Quiz

1. (B) A plain-English sentence — punchline before picture
2. (A) Zero
3. (B) Second
4. (A) 'will' cannot follow IF in a first conditional
5. (B) Names shape, story and ask

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Trend collocations

1. spiked
2. plateaued
3. slumped; rebounded
4. doubled
5. outlier

Exercise 2 — Zero, first or second?

1. cut; drop (zero conditional)
2. closes; will beat (first)
3. crashed; would freeze (second)
4. hold; will flat-line (first)
5. halved; would hit (second)

Exercise 3 — Fix the grammar

1. 'If we grow 20%, we'll hire two more engineers.' (No 'will' in the if-clause.)
2. 'If we cut prices, sign-ups go up.' (Zero conditional: both present.)
3. 'If we doubled the ad budget, we'd grow 15%.'
4. 'If the November deal closes, we'll beat plan.' (Realistic → first conditional.)

Exercise 5 — Three chart-walkthroughs

1. Voice B (Rafael) — names the shape, gives the story, uses a first-conditional ask.
2. Voice A (Priya) — 'concerning trajectory / meaningful degradation' — no shape, no ask.
3. Voice C (Danny) — 'we'll definitely bring it back under 2%' — no lever named.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: The board deck

1. Model: keep the +35% headline, add ONE second-conditional right after it — 'if both November renewals walked, we'd land at 5.0 — still 20% up'. The number stays; the credibility triples.
2. Model: three columns — Commit (5.0), Plan (5.4), Stretch (5.6). Under each: ONE assumption that has to hold, ONE lever that moves it.
3. Model: 'If a board member can't circle the ONE number and the ONE risk in five seconds, the slide is not done.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 5 · B5A

What would you do?

Theme: People & Culture



Learning objectives

- Give and receive feedback without sounding harsh — or vague.
- Use unreal (second) conditionals to explore workplace scenarios safely.
- Talk about leadership choices using values-language ('what I care about is...').

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · One boss, one habit

Think about the best manager you've ever had (real, one person). In 45 seconds out loud: name ONE thing they did every week that you'd steal if you ran a team tomorrow. Then record it as a 30-second voice note.

Name the HABIT, not the personality ('she did X every Monday...').

Say what it made YOU do differently.

One sentence: what would you copy tomorrow if you had five reports?

Bonus: what's the WORST habit you've inherited from a former boss?

Lead-in: kind or clear?

Decide: CLEAR (behaviour + impact + ask), CUSHIONED (kind but vague) or LOADED (personal attack).

1. 'You need to be more of a team player.'

2. 'In stand-up you interrupted Ana three times. Can you let people finish?'

3. 'Honestly, you're doing great, just keep going!'

4. 'Some people have raised concerns about your communication.'

followUp: Which CLEAR line could you copy into your next 1:1?

Reading: Feedback that lands (and feedback that leaks)

Most feedback fails not because it's too harsh, but because it's too fuzzy. 'You need to be more strategic' tells someone nothing they can do on Monday morning. Feedback that lands almost always has three moving parts: a specific behaviour ('in Tuesday's stand-up, you interrupted three times'), an impact ('the room went quiet for the rest of the meeting') and an ask ('please let people finish next time'). Behaviour + impact + ask. Miss any one of the three and the feedback either bruises or evaporates.

The second-conditional is a surprisingly useful tool here — because 'if I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before' is coaching, while 'you always send the deck too late' is an accusation. The unreal conditional does two things at once: it invites the other person into the scenario ('IF I were you'), and it separates who they ARE from what they DID. That's why great coaches ask 'if you ran that meeting again next Tuesday, what would you do differently?' — it's a rewind button without a blame button.

The trap is confusing kindness with clarity. 'You're doing great, keep going!' feels kind, but it leaves the person without a compass. And the mirror-image trap — 'you always miss deadlines' — feels clear but it's actually a label, not a behaviour. Real feedback is boringly specific about what happened, honest

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



about the impact, and generous about the next step. Everything else is either theatre or damage.

1. Feedback that lands has three parts. They are...
 - (A) Kind words, praise sandwich, smile
 - (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
 - (C) Strategy, alignment and synergy
2. The second-conditional works in coaching because it...
 - (A) Sounds academic
 - (B) Separates who someone IS from what they DID
 - (C) Is more polite
3. 'You're doing great, keep going!' is criticised because it...
 - (A) Is too harsh
 - (B) Leaves the person without a compass
 - (C) Uses the wrong tense
4. 'You always miss deadlines' is a label because...
 - (A) 'Always' is exaggerated and it's not a behaviour
 - (B) Deadlines are subjective
 - (C) It's in the present simple

Vocabulary in context

Match the feedback / leadership term to its plain-English meaning.

- 1:1 (one-to-one)** — a regular short meeting between manager and report
- retrospective / retro** — a look-back at what worked and what didn't after a project
- psychological safety** — people feel safe to admit mistakes without being punished
- actionable feedback** — feedback the receiver can actually do something with
- blind spot** — something you don't see about yourself that others do
- praise sandwich** — praise → criticism → praise; often more theatre than help

Vocabulary: feedback moves, leadership words, values-language

- give / receive feedback** — the reciprocal halves of a single interpersonal competency
- call something out** — name a problem behaviour openly
- push back (on)** — disagree, professionally
- own (a mistake)** — candidly acknowledge accountability rather than attributing fault elsewhere
- circle back** — return to a topic in a later conversation

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



set the tone — model, deliberately and visibly, the conduct the team is expected to emulate

hold someone to account — ensure rigorous follow-through on stated commitments

coach vs. tell — ask questions to help them think, vs. give the answer

give someone air time — let a quieter person speak in a meeting

lead by example — show, don't just say

what I care about is... — name your value before your critique

the standard here is... — make the norm explicit, not implied

I'd rather be honest than comfortable — flag when you're choosing candour over ease

that's not a hill I'll die on — signal you can live with the other choice

trust battery — how charged your relationship with someone is right now

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. Astute managers deliberately ____ the tone in week one — thereafter, the team simply emulates it.

2. I don't need you to agree with me; I need you to ____ when you don't.

3. The fastest way to earn respect from a team is to ____ your mistakes publicly.

4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak. Next time, give her ____.

5. That decision isn't perfect but ____ — let's ship it.

6. Before you critique, name ____ — 'what I care about is the customer'.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/phrase from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. You need to <u>disagree, professionally</u> more often in our planning meetings.

2. Great managers deliberately <u>model, visibly, the conduct expected</u> in week one.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

3. The fastest way to earn trust is to <u>candidly acknowledge accountability</u> for your mistakes.
-
4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak — next time, <u>let her speak in the meeting</u>.
-
5. That decision isn't perfect, but <u>I can live with the other choice</u> — let's ship it.
-

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short LinkedIn-style reflection to your team explaining a leadership lesson from a recent feedback conversation, using values-language.

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: This week I gave a piece of feedback I'd been avoiding, and it taught me something about leadership. What I care about is that our meetings work for everyone, not just the loudest voice. I named the behaviour directly, then asked a coaching question instead of a label. The result: the person didn't get defensive — they pushed back, and we found a better answer together. The lesson I'm taking into next quarter: set the tone early, give quieter colleagues air time, and own your own mistakes before asking others to own theirs. None of this works if you wait for the perfect moment. My takeaway for the team: give feedback this week, not next.



Grammar focus: Second (unreal) conditional

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Form — if + past simple, would + verb — The 'past' here is grammatical, not real time. Use for imagined / hypothetical / hard-to-happen situations. • 'If I were your manager, I'd send you into the room with the CFO for a week.' • 'If we cut the meeting from 60 to 30 minutes, would decisions get faster?' • 'If she left tomorrow, we'd lose two years of context in one afternoon.' Note: use WERE (not was) with I / he / she / it in formal / written English — 'If I were you'.

2. Why it's a great coaching tool — Second conditional lets you talk about someone's behaviour WITHOUT accusing. 'If you were running that meeting again, what would you do differently?' is a rewind button — no blame, just repair. 'You always run bad meetings' has already lost the room.

3. Softening advice — 'If I were you, I'd...' — This is the classic soft-advice frame at B2. It signals: this is my opinion, not an order. • 'If I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before.' • 'If I were you, I wouldn't reply to that Slack message until Monday morning.'

4. Common trap — WOULD in the if-clause — 'If I would be your manager, I would talk to you' ✗ Correct: 'If I were your manager, I'd talk to you.' ■ The WOULD lives in the main clause only. Also: 'If I was' is acceptable in speech, but 'If I were' is safer in writing and coaching contexts.

Exercise A — Put the verb in the right form

Fill in the blanks. All items are second conditional.

1. If I ____ (be) you, I ____ (send) the deck the night before.

2. If we ____ (cut) the meeting to 30 minutes, ____ we ____ (decide) faster?

3. If she ____ (leave) tomorrow, we ____ (lose) two years of context.

4. If you ____ (run) that 1:1 again next Tuesday, what ____ you ____ (do) differently?

5. If I ____ (not/care) about you, I ____ (not/give) you this feedback.

Exercise B — Rewrite the accusation as coaching

Rewrite each 'label' into a second-conditional coaching question or 'If I were you' advice.

1. 'You always send the deck at the last minute.'

2. 'You dominated the meeting again.'

3. 'You need to be more strategic.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. 'You never push back on the CEO.'

Exercise C — 'What would you do?' — real workplace dilemmas

For each dilemma, answer in *ONE* sentence using a second conditional. Then, in a second sentence, give a reason using 'what I care about is...'.

1. A senior colleague takes credit for your idea in front of the CEO. What would you do?

2. A direct report is clearly burning out but insists 'I'm fine, I'm fine'. What would you do?

3. You inherit a team where two people quietly hate each other and it's poisoning meetings. What would you do?

Listening: three managers, one piece of feedback

You're a director. Three of your managers have to give the same feedback to the same person: 'Sam's Monday updates are too long — the team has stopped reading them.' You're deciding which style to coach the others toward.

pre

Which manager do you predict will land the feedback best — and what will land it?

What is ONE phrase you're allergic to hearing in feedback ('some people have said...')?

gist

1. Which manager lands the feedback, and why?

2. Which manager cushions until the feedback disappears?

3. Which manager is technically clear but leaves the relationship worse?

detail

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. What is the exact BEHAVIOUR Nadia names?

2. What IMPACT does she name?

3. What is her ASK, phrased as a second conditional?

Third listen — feedback craft

Focus on HOW each manager delivers it. Answer from what they DO, not what they say.

1. Nadia opens with 'what I care about is'. What work does that do?

2. Marc uses six softeners in 40 seconds ('maybe', 'a tiny bit', 'no worries', 'when you can', 'just a thought', 'if you feel like it'). What's the effect?

3. Ade's feedback is technically accurate but Sam quits within a month. What ONE change would fix it?

Language from the audio — high-trust feedback moves

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"What I care about is that the team actually reads it." — names the value BEFORE the critique — anchors trust

"If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words?" — second conditional coaching question — rewind without blame

"I've counted — it's grown from 200 to 1,100 words in eight weeks." — specific behaviour with a number — kills 'no it hasn't'

"Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph." — names the impact with evidence, not opinion

"That's the standard here — updates the team will actually open." — makes the norm explicit, not implied

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



"If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 words and see who reads it." — soft-advice frame — my opinion, not an order

Voice A (Marc): Hi Sam! Just a really quick one — no worries at all — your Monday updates are absolutely great, honestly, but maybe, if you feel like it, when you have time, you could just, you know, tighten them up a tiny bit? Just a thought. But honestly, all good, no rush at all, love your work.

Voice B (Nadia): Sam, quick one and I want to be straight with you — what I care about is that the team actually reads your update, because it's a good one. I've counted: it's grown from about 200 words to 1,100 words over the last eight weeks. Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph and don't read the rest. If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words? If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 and see who reads it — that's the standard here.

Voice C (Ade): Sam. Your Monday updates are bloated. Nobody reads them. They're way too long, they've been too long for weeks, and it's frankly a waste of everyone's time. Sort it out for next Monday.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second feedback

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) delivering the feedback. You MUST include: (1) 'what I care about is...' opener, (2) a specific behaviour with a number or a date, (3) the impact with evidence, (4) at least ONE second-conditional coaching question, (5) a clear ask.

Scene: Your real 1:1 (recommended)

A: You give feedback.

B: Imagined listener: a real direct report or peer you owe a piece of feedback to.

Scene: The teammate who dominates meetings

A: You give the feedback.

B: Imagined listener: a peer who interrupted three times in Tuesday's stand-up.

Scene: The manager who's your boss

A: You give upward feedback.

B: Imagined listener: your boss, who reschedules your 1:1 four weeks in a row.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Extra speaking task — 30-second 'trust-battery repair'

Now imagine the feedback conversation went badly — the person walked out defensive. Record a **30-second voice note** you'd send them the next morning to repair. Two sentences only: (1) 'What I care about is our working relationship, not being right yesterday.' (2) ONE second-conditional invitation to rewind ('if we had that conversation again on Monday, what would you want from me?').

Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your feedback (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'What I care about is...' (the value). Sentence 2: behaviour + impact with one specific number. Sentence 3: ONE second-conditional coaching question — no order, no label.

Wrap-up

One piece of feedback you'll stop cushioning and start delivering clearly.

One 'If I were you, I'd...' line you'll use in your next 1:1.

One value ('what I care about is...') you'll name out loud before you critique.

Quiz

- Feedback that lands has three parts. They are...
 - Praise, criticism, praise
 - Behaviour, impact and ask
 - Kind, clear, quick
- 'If I were you, I'd send the deck the night before' is...
 - First conditional
 - Second conditional
 - Zero conditional
- 'If I would be your manager, I would talk to you' is wrong because...
 - 'would' cannot appear in the if-clause of a second conditional
 - 'talk' should be past
 - 'you' should be 'to you'
- 'You need to be more strategic' fails as feedback because it...
 - Is too formal
 - Is a label, not a behaviour + impact + ask
 - Uses the wrong tense
- The manager who lands the feedback and keeps the relationship is the one who...
 - Softens six times in one sentence
 - Names the value first, then behaviour + impact + a second-conditional question
 - Says 'sort it out'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Feedback & leadership vocabulary

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

Word bank: set the tone · push back · own · air time · trust battery · what I care about is

1. Great managers ____ ____ ____ in week one — the team just copies from then on.

2. I don't need you to agree; I need you to ____ ____ when you don't.

3. The surest way to build credibility is to ____ your mistakes publicly.

4. In yesterday's brainstorm, give Ana ____ ____ — she didn't speak.

5. After that call, my ____ ____ with the client is running perilously low.

6. Before you critique, name the value — '____ ____ ____ the customer'.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word personal 'Leadership Philosophy' statement for your team's internal wiki. Explain how you want to manage feedback and communication, using terms like 'trust battery', 'pushing back', and 'owning' mistakes.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use second conditional for coaching/hypothetical scenarios.

Maintain an authentic and professional tone.

Focus on values and expected behaviors.

model: My Leadership Philosophy As your manager, my goal is to create an environment where everyone feels empowered to do their best work. What I care about is transparency and accountability. I believe that leaders must set the tone for the rest of the team; therefore, I will always own my mistakes publicly and I expect you to do the same. This honesty is essential to maintaining our collective trust battery. I don't just want you to agree with my decisions; I want you to push back when you see a better way forward. If you were to disagree with a strategy I proposed, I would expect you to bring evidence to the table so we can improve it together. I will also ensure that everyone gets equal air time in our brainstorming sessions, regardless of their seniority. If we were to work this way consistently, I am confident we would become the highest-performing team in the company. My door is always open for honest, constructive dialogue.

Exercise 2 — Second conditional

Put the verbs in brackets in the correct second-conditional form.

1. If I ____ (be) you, I ____ (send) the deck the night before.

2. If we ____ (cut) that meeting to 30 minutes, ____ we ____ (decide) faster?

3. If she ____ (leave) tomorrow, we ____ (lose) two years of context.

4. If you ____ (run) that 1:1 again next Tuesday, what ____ you ____ (do) differently?

5. If I ____ (not/care), I ____ (not/give) you this feedback.

Exercise 3 — Clear, cushioned or loaded?

Which kind of feedback is each line — CLEAR (behaviour + impact + ask), CUSHIONED (kind but not actionable) or LOADED (personal attack)?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'You need to be more of a team player.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
2. 'In Tuesday's stand-up you interrupted Ana three times — the room went quiet. Can you let people finish next time?'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
3. 'Honestly, you're doing great — just keep going!'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
4. 'Your report was messy again.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
5. 'If I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the accusation as a coaching question

Rewrite each 'label' into a second-conditional coaching question ('If you were doing X again, what would you...?').

1. 'You always send the deck at the last minute.'

2. 'You dominated the meeting again.'

3. 'You need to be more strategic.'

4. 'You never push back on the CEO.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Three managers, one piece of feedback

You'll hear three managers give the same feedback to Sam: 'Monday updates are too long — the team has stopped reading them.'

1. Which manager lands the feedback?

2. Which manager cushions until the feedback disappears?

3. Which manager is technically clear but breaks the relationship?

Voice A (Marc): Hi Sam — no worries at all — your updates are great, but maybe, if you have time, you could tighten them up a tiny bit. Just a thought. All good, no rush.

Voice B (Nadia): Sam — what I care about is that the team actually reads your update. It's grown from about 200 to 1,100 words in eight weeks. Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph. If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words? If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 and see who reads it.

Voice C (Ade): Sam. Your updates are bloated. Nobody reads them. Sort it out for next Monday.

Exercise 6 — Write a 3-sentence piece of feedback

Think of one real piece of feedback you owe someone. Write it in 3 sentences (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'What I care about is...' (value). Sentence 2: behaviour + impact with a specific number or date. Sentence 3: ONE second-conditional coaching question — no label, no order.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: kind or clear?

1. LOADED — vague label, no ask.
2. CLEAR — behaviour + impact + ask.
3. CUSHIONED — kind but unactionable.
4. LOADED — anonymous, unspecific.

Reading: Feedback that lands (and feedback that leaks)

1. (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
2. (B) Separates who someone IS from what they DID
3. (B) Leaves the person without a compass
4. (A) 'Always' is exaggerated and it's not a behaviour

Vocabulary: feedback moves, leadership words, values-language

1. set
2. push back
3. own
4. air time
5. that's not a hill I'll die on
6. what I care about is
1. You need to push back more often in our planning meetings.
2. Great managers deliberately set the tone in week one.
3. The fastest way to earn trust is to own your mistakes.
4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak — next time, give her air time.
5. That decision isn't perfect, but that's not a hill I'll die on — let's ship it.

Grammar focus: Second (unreal) conditional

1. were; would send / 'd send
2. cut; would we decide
3. left; would lose / 'd lose
4. ran; would you do
5. didn't care; wouldn't give
1. Model: 'If you were sending it again next Thursday, when would you get it to us — and what would you need to make that possible?'
2. Model: 'If you were chairing that meeting again, how would you make sure Ana and Marc both got 3 minutes each?'
3. Model: 'If you had one hour a week protected for strategy — no calls, no Slack — what's the ONE thing you'd use it for?'
4. Model: 'If you disagreed with a CEO decision tomorrow, what would you need — permission, evidence, an ally — to say so?'
1. Model: 'If it were the first time, I'd let it go and flag it privately to her afterwards — what I care about is the working relationship, not the ownership.' (Model B: 'If it were the third time, I'd name it in the moment — what I care about is the pattern, not this one meeting.')'
2. Model: 'If I were her manager, I'd make her take Friday off — not ask, tell — and cover her calls myself. What I care about is that she's still here in six months.'
3. Model: 'If I inherited that team, I'd have a 20-minute 1:1 with each of them in week one and name the elephant — what I care about is not pretending I don't see it.'

Listening: three managers, one piece of feedback

1. Voice B (Nadia). Names the behaviour, the impact and the ask; uses 'if I were you' to soften; ends with 'what I care about is that the team actually reads it'.
2. Voice A (Marc) — 'you're doing great, just maybe a tiny tweak, no worries at all' — Sam will walk out believing everything is fine.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Voice C (Ade) — accurate but weaponised: 'they're bloated, nobody reads them, sort it out'. No second conditional, no value named, no ask.

1. The Monday update has grown from 200 words to 1,100 words over eight weeks.

2. Three team members admitted in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph and don't read the rest.

3. 'If you were writing next Monday's update again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words?'

1. It anchors the feedback in a value BEFORE the critique. Sam hears 'she's on my side' before hearing 'and here's the problem'. It halves the defensiveness.

2. Six softeners = the message doesn't land at all. Sam walks out thinking 'she liked it, sounds like maybe reduce it slightly'. Nothing changes.

3. Add a value ('what I care about is you not burning out over an update no one reads') and swap 'sort it out' for a second-conditional coaching question ('if you were writing it again, what would you cut first?').

Quiz

1. (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
2. (B) Second conditional
3. (A) 'would' cannot appear in the if-clause of a second conditional
4. (B) Is a label, not a behaviour + impact + ask
5. (B) Names the value first, then behaviour + impact + a second-conditional question

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Feedback & leadership vocabulary

1. set the tone
2. push back
3. own
4. air time
5. trust battery
6. what I care about is

Exercise 2 — Second conditional

1. were; would send / 'd send
2. cut; would we decide
3. left; would lose / 'd lose
4. ran; would you do
5. didn't care; wouldn't give

Exercise 3 — Clear, cushioned or loaded?

1. (C) LOADED
2. (A) CLEAR
3. (B) CUSHIONED
4. (C) LOADED
5. (A) CLEAR

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the accusation as a coaching question

1. Model: 'If you were sending it again next Thursday, when would you get it to us — and what would you need to make that possible?'
2. Model: 'If you were chairing that meeting again, how would you make sure Ana and Marc both got 3 minutes each?'
3. Model: 'If you had one hour a week protected for strategy, what's the ONE thing you'd use it for?'
4. Model: 'If you disagreed with a CEO decision tomorrow, what would you need — permission, evidence, an ally — to say so?'

Exercise 5 — Three managers, one piece of feedback

1. Voice B (Nadia) — behaviour, impact, second-conditional question, value named ('what I care about is').
2. Voice A (Marc) — six softeners in one sentence; Sam thinks everything is fine.
3. Voice C (Ade) — accurate but weaponised; no value, no coaching question.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 5 · B5B

Lessons learned

Theme: People & Culture



Learning objectives

- Run a short retrospective that's honest without being brutal.
- Use 'I wish / if only' + past perfect to express regrets and hindsight without blame.
- Use -ed / -ing adjectives correctly to describe how work makes you FEEL vs how work IS.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · One decision, one regret

Think of *ONE* work decision from the last 12 months you'd take back if you could — small or huge. In 45 seconds out loud: (1) what you decided, (2) what you now wish you'd done, (3) the *ONE* thing it taught you. Record a 30-second voice note.

Name the decision in *ONE* sentence — no story, no context.

Use 'I wish I had...' or 'If only we had...' — full grammar, not a shortcut.

The lesson has to be portable — something you could tell someone else next Monday.

Bonus: is the lesson actually 'I wouldn't do this again' — or 'I did the right thing at the time'?

Lead-in: regret or excuse?

Decide: *REGRET* (owns it, has a lesson), *EXCUSE* (shifts blame) or *PLATITUDE* (sounds wise, says nothing).

1. 'I wish we'd talked to a customer before writing any code.'

2. 'If only marketing had briefed us properly.'

3. 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.'

4. 'To be fair, the market moved — nobody could have predicted that.'

followUp: Which line is closest to what *YOU* said in your last retro?

Reading: Blameless post-mortems, and why most retros aren't one

'Blameless post-mortem' is a phrase that comes out of engineering, but the idea is older than software. It rests on one assumption: given the same information, the same pressure and the same tools, most reasonable people would have made the same call. So the interesting question in a retro is never 'whose fault was it?' — it's 'what did the system make easy that we now know was wrong?' Ask that, and the room stops defending and starts learning.

The grammar of a good retro is 'I wish' + past perfect. 'I wish we'd talked to a customer before we built it.' 'If only I'd flagged the risk in week two instead of week eight.' The past perfect ('had talked / had flagged') matters — it puts the regret in the specific past moment where the decision lived, not floating in a general 'we should be better'. Compare 'I wish we talked to customers more' (fuzzy, ongoing, no lesson) with 'I wish we'd talked to that customer before we shipped that feature in March' (specific, dated, portable).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



The other trap in retros is confusing FEELINGS with FACTS. That's where -ed / -ing adjectives earn their keep. 'The launch was frustrating' means the launch itself HAD that quality — it was, factually, hard to work on. 'I was frustrated' names how I FELT. Both are true. Both are useful. But 'the marketing team was frustrating' is a personal attack dressed up as a fact — and it will end the retro. Get the -ed/-ing right and you can be honest without being unfair.

1. The core assumption of a blameless post-mortem is that...
 - (A) No one is ever responsible
 - (B) Given the same info and pressure, most reasonable people would have made the same call
 - (C) Feelings are more important than facts
2. The grammar signature of a good regret in a retro is...
 - (A) 'I would have done X'
 - (B) 'I wish' / 'if only' + past perfect
 - (C) 'Some people said...'
3. 'The launch was frustrating' means...
 - (A) I felt frustrated by it
 - (B) The launch itself, factually, had that quality — it was hard to work on
 - (C) Someone was to blame
4. 'I wish we talked to customers more' is criticised because it...
 - (A) Uses the wrong tense
 - (B) Is fuzzy and ongoing — no lesson tied to a specific decision
 - (C) Is grammatically wrong

Vocabulary in context

Match the retrospective / lessons-learned term to its plain-English meaning.

post-mortem — a structured review after something went wrong

hindsight — understanding you have AFTER the event that you didn't have before

root cause — the deepest reason, not the surface symptom

own the mistake — publicly accept it as yours, without deflecting

action item — one concrete thing someone will do by a date

blameless — focused on the system, not on which person to punish

Vocabulary: -ed vs -ing adjectives, retro moves, hindsight phrases

I was frustrated — how I FELT (-ed = feeling)

I was disappointed — how I FELT

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



I was surprised — how I FELT

I was exhausted — how I FELT

I was confused — how I FELT

the process was frustrating — what the thing WAS (-ing = quality)

the result was disappointing — quality of the thing

the outcome was surprising — quality of the thing

the timeline was exhausting — quality of the thing

the brief was confusing — quality of the thing

call out — identify and articulate something candidly, whether commendable or concerning

shout out (n.) — public credit given to someone specific

learning (n.) — the transferable insight distilled from a misstep

action item — a discrete, accountable commitment with a named owner and deadline

kick the can down the road — defer a decision indefinitely, usually to the organisation's detriment

practice

Complete each sentence with the right -ed / -ing adjective OR retro phrase.

1. The whole re-platform was ____ — six months, three re-scopes, one exit.

2. I was genuinely ____ by how swiftly the team recovered from the outage.

3. That brief was ____ — I read it three times and I still couldn't tell you the deliverable.

4. One ____ from this quarter: talk to a customer before writing a line of code.

5. Big ____ to Priya — she rebuilt the pipeline over a weekend without being asked.

6. We keep ____ on the pricing decision — someone has to just make the call.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/expression from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. The whole re-platform was <u>emotionally and physically draining</u> — six months, three re-scopes, one exit.
2. I was genuinely <u>caught off guard</u> by how swiftly the team recovered from the outage.
3. That brief was <u>hard to understand</u> — I read it three times and still couldn't tell you the deliverable.
4. Big <u>public credit</u> to Priya — she rebuilt the pipeline over a weekend without being asked.
5. We keep <u>deferring the decision indefinitely</u> on the pricing question — someone has to just make the call.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short retrospective memo to your team summarising lessons from a recent project setback, including one named action item.

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: Retro — Q3 Launch I wish we'd talked to five customers before we locked scope in April; if we had, we'd have caught the pricing signal three months earlier. That's on me — I chaired the kick-off and let the scope through without customer input. The process itself was exhausting for the team, and I was disappointed with the result — those are two different things, and both are true. One learning we can carry forward: no scope lock without customer conversations. A big shout out to the engineering team, who stopped kicking the can down the road on the migration and shipped it in a weekend. Action item: Rafa updates the launch checklist by Friday. Recommendation: adopt this checklist as the standard before every future launch.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar focus: I wish / If only + past perfect

1. Form — wish / if only + past perfect (had + past participle) — Use for regrets about the past — things you cannot change. • 'I wish we HAD talked to a customer before we built it.' • 'If only I HAD pushed back on the deadline in week one.' • 'I wish I hadn't fired that email at 11pm.' Contractions in speech: 'I wish we'd talked...' / 'If only I'd flagged...'. Write it out in a retro slide.

2. Wish + past simple — regret about the PRESENT — Different meaning: not about a past mistake, but about how things are NOW. • 'I wish I HAD more time this quarter.' (present regret) • 'I wish the client WASN'T so silent.' (right now) Don't confuse the two — the tense choice IS the meaning.

3. Wish + would — regret about someone else's habit — 'I wish you would stop checking Slack in 1:1s.' → I want your ongoing behaviour to change. Don't use 'wish + would' for yourself: 'I wish I would go to the gym' ✗ → 'I wish I went to the gym' ■ (present regret).

4. Common trap — I wish I would have — 'I wish I would have talked to the customer' is very common in casual speech — but in written / professional / feedback contexts, it's the past perfect that carries weight: 'I wish I HAD talked to the customer'. In a retro slide, always write the past perfect version.

Exercise A — Choose the right form

Fill in with *wish + past perfect* OR *wish + past simple* OR *wish + would*.

1. (Regret about April launch) I wish we ____ (test) the payment flow one more time.

2. (About present bandwidth) I wish I ____ (have) more time this quarter.

3. (Someone else's habit) I wish you ____ ____ ____ (stop) replying-all on internal threads.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. (Regret about not saying it) I wish I ____ ____ (push back) on the deadline in week one.

5. (About my own habit — do NOT use would) I wish I ____ (be) better at protecting focus time.

Exercise B — Rewrite the excuse as a regret

Rewrite each excuse into a regret that owns the mistake (I wish / if only + past perfect).

1. 'Marketing didn't brief us — that's why we shipped late.'

2. 'The client kept changing scope, so of course we missed it.'

3. 'The engineer left, so we couldn't ship.'

4. 'The market shifted — nobody could have predicted that.'

Exercise C — -ed or -ing?

Choose the correct adjective form.

1. That re-org announcement was completely (confusing / confused) — nobody knew who they reported to.

2. I was (frustrating / frustrated) that we hadn't been asked before the decision.

3. The Q3 result was (disappointing / disappointed) — we came in 14% below plan.

4. By December I was completely (exhausting / exhausted) — I took two weeks off in January.

5. The onboarding I got in week one was (surprising / surprised) — in a good way.

Listening: three retros, one failed launch

The same product launch failed. Three team leads run a 60-second retro on it, in front of the exec team. You're picking ONE to run the company-wide post-mortem next Friday.

pre

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Which lead do you predict will land it — and what will land it?

What is ONE phrase you're allergic to hearing in a retro ('at the end of the day...' / 'lessons learned...')?

gist

1. Which lead wins the slot, and why?

2. Which lead spends the whole retro blaming another team?

3. Which lead is warm and inspiring but leaves no actual lesson?

detail

1. What is Marta's specific regret (with a date)?

2. What ONE learning does Marta name that the team can carry to the next launch?

3. What action item does she assign, to whom, and by when?

Third listen — retro craft

Focus on HOW each lead runs the retro. Answer from what they DO, not what they say.

1. Marta uses 'I wish we'd' before 'if only they'd'. Why does the order matter?

2. Jonas's retro is technically full of insights, but the exec team doesn't trust him afterwards. Why?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Chichi's team loves her retros — but the same mistake repeats next quarter. What is she missing?

Language from the audio — retro moves that actually work

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"I wish we'd talked to five customers in early March, before we locked scope in April." — regret + past perfect + specific date = credible ownership

"That's on me — I chaired the kick-off and I let the scope through." — owns the mistake by role, not personality

"The learning is: no scope lock without five customer conversations." — converts the mistake into a portable rule

"Rafa updates the checklist by end of day Friday." — action item = person + verb + date

"I was disappointed with the result, and the process was disappointing — those are two different things." — correctly separates feeling (-ed) from quality (-ing)

"If only marketing had briefed us properly." — shifts blame outward — the exec team stops trusting the speaker

Voice A (Jonas): Look, honestly? If only marketing had briefed us properly, none of this would have happened. And if only sales had qualified the pipeline better, we wouldn't have been chasing that segment in the first place. The team did everything we could — we just didn't get the support we needed. Frustrating quarter, but the lesson is that alignment across functions has to improve.

Voice B (Marta): OK, honest post-mortem. That's on me — I chaired the kick-off and I let the scope through without customer input. I wish we'd talked to five customers in early March, before we locked scope in April. If we had, we'd have caught the pricing signal three months earlier. I was disappointed with the result, and separately, the process itself was disappointing — those are two different things. So: the learning is no scope lock without five customer conversations, full stop. Action item: Rafa updates the launch checklist by end of day Friday, I'll re-share it in Monday's all-hands. That's the change.

Voice C (Chichi): Team, wow — what a journey. Honestly, I'm so proud of everyone. Failure is fuel, we grew so much as a group, we learned so many lessons, and at the end of the day, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I know it hurts today but in six months we're going to look back on this and smile.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second retro

Solo task. Pick ONE real project (or one from your last 12 months) that didn't land the way you wanted. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) running the retro. You MUST include: (1) ONE 'I wish we'd...' with a specific date, (2) 'that's on me — I...' (own the role, not the personality), (3) at least ONE correctly-used -ed and one -ing adjective, (4) ONE portable learning as a rule, (5) ONE action item = person + verb + date.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Scene: Your real failed / bumpy project (recommended)

A: You run the retro.

B: Imagined listener: your team + your boss.

Scene: A launch that missed its number

A: You run the retro.

B: Imagined listener: the exec team, who wants to know what changes on Monday.

Scene: A hire that didn't work out

A: You run the retro on your own hiring process.

B: Imagined listener: your HR partner + your own future self next time you hire.

Extra speaking task — the 20-second 'one-line rule'

Now compress the retro to ONE sentence — the ONE rule you want the team to remember in six months.

Format: 'From now on, we never / always ____, because ____.' Record a 20-second voice note of that single sentence, said as if you were pinning it to the wall.

Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your retro (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'I wish we had...' with a specific date. Sentence 2: the ONE portable learning as a rule ('From now on, we never / always...'). Sentence 3: action item — who does what, by when.

Wrap-up

One 'I wish we had...' from this quarter you're finally saying out loud.

One -ed / -ing pair you'll stop mixing up ('I was disappointed' vs 'it was disappointing').

One action item — person + verb + date — you'll ship from your next retro.

Quiz

1. The grammar of a good regret in a retro is...

(A) will + verb

(B) wish / if only + past perfect

(C) should + verb

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. 'I wish we ____ to a customer before we shipped.' Fill the gap.
- (A) talked
 - (B) had talked
 - (C) would talk
3. 'The result was disappointing' vs 'I was disappointed'. These are...
- (A) The same sentence
 - (B) Two different meanings — quality of the thing vs my feeling
 - (C) Both grammatically wrong
4. 'If only marketing had briefed us properly' is criticised in a retro because it...
- (A) Is the wrong tense
 - (B) Blames another team — no lesson the speaker can carry
 - (C) Is too formal
5. The retro that changes anything ends with...
- (A) 'What a journey, we grew so much'
 - (B) A portable rule + one action item = person + verb + date
 - (C) 'Lessons learned!'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Retro vocabulary

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

Word bank: hindsight · root cause · shout out · action item · own · post-mortem

1. In ____, we should have talked to five customers before locking the scope.

2. The surface problem was the outage; the ____ was that the on-call runbook hadn't been updated in 18 months.

3. Big ____ to Priya — she rebuilt the pipeline over the weekend without being asked.

4. Every genuine ____ requires a named owner and a deadline, or it is merely an aspiration.

5. The surest way to rebuild trust is to ____ the mistake publicly, without deflecting.

6. We're running a blameless ____ - ____ on the failed launch on Friday.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word formal post-mortem report for a project that did not go as planned. Use the unit's vocabulary to analyze the failure, 'own' the responsibility, and list clear 'action items' for the future.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use 'wish' and 'if only' to express regret professionally.

Focus on portable learnings rather than blame.

Clearly list at least two dated action items.

model: Post-Mortem Report: Project Helios Project Helios did not meet its primary launch objectives, and in hindsight, it is clear that we underestimated the technical complexity of the integration. As the project lead, I own the failure to communicate these risks to the board earlier. If only we had conducted a more thorough technical audit in January, we would have adjusted the timeline accordingly. We have identified the root cause as a lack of synchronization between the API team and the front-end developers. I wish we had implemented weekly cross-functional syncs from day one. On a positive note, a huge shout out to Sarah for her tireless work on the patch during the final weekend. Our primary learning is that we must never lock scope without a signed-off technical feasibility study. Action items: 1. Marcus to update the project kick-off template by Friday. 2. Engineering to conduct a code review of the Helios module by next Tuesday. We will use these lessons to ensure the success of Project Selene.

Exercise 2 — Wish / if only

Put the verbs in brackets in the correct form (wish + past perfect / wish + past simple / wish + would).

1. (Regret about April launch) I wish we ____ (test) the payment flow one more time.

2. (About present bandwidth) I wish I ____ (have) more time this quarter.

3. (Someone else's habit) I wish you ____ ____ (stop) replying-all on internal threads.

4. (Regret about not saying it) I wish I ____ ____ (push back) on the deadline in week one.

5. (About my own habit) I wish I ____ (be) better at protecting focus time.

6. (Regret about the email) I wish I ____ ____ (send) that email at 11pm.

Exercise 3 — -ed or -ing?

Choose the correct adjective form.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. That re-org announcement was completely (confusing / confused).
(A) confusing
(B) confused
2. I was (frustrating / frustrated) that we weren't asked before the decision.
(A) frustrating
(B) frustrated
3. The Q3 result was (disappointing / disappointed) — we came in 14% below plan.
(A) disappointing
(B) disappointed
4. By December I was completely (exhausting / exhausted).
(A) exhausting
(B) exhausted
5. The onboarding I got was (surprising / surprised) — in a good way.
(A) surprising
(B) surprised

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the excuse as a regret

Rewrite each excuse into a regret that owns the mistake (I wish / if only + past perfect).

1. 'Marketing didn't brief us — that's why we shipped late.'

2. 'The client kept changing scope, so of course we missed it.'

3. 'The engineer left, so we couldn't ship.'

4. 'The market shifted — nobody could have predicted that.'

Exercise 5 — Three retros, one failed launch

You'll hear three team leads run a 60-second retro on the same failed launch. You're picking one to lead the company-wide post-mortem.

1. Which lead wins the slot?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Which lead spends the retro blaming other teams?

3. Which lead is warm and inspiring but leaves no actual lesson?

Voice A (Jonas): Honestly, if only marketing had briefed us properly, none of this would have happened. And if only sales had qualified better, we wouldn't have been chasing that segment. The team did everything we could.

Voice B (Marta): OK, honest post-mortem. That's on me — I chaired the kick-off and I let the scope through without customer input. I wish we'd talked to five customers in early March, before we locked scope in April. The learning is no scope lock without five customer conversations. Action item: Rafa updates the launch checklist by end of day Friday, I'll re-share it in Monday's all-hands.

Voice C (Chichi): Team, what a journey — I'm so proud of everyone. Failure is fuel, we grew so much, we learned so many lessons. In six months we're going to look back on this and smile.

Exercise 6 — Write your 3-sentence retro

Pick one real project from the last year that didn't land the way you wanted. Write the retro in 3 sentences (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'I wish we had...' with a specific date. Sentence 2: the ONE portable learning as a rule ('From now on, we never / always...'). Sentence 3: action item — who does what, by when.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Northwind Payments

Think about the Northwind case (the 12 downgraded reviews, 4 resignations, #review-support channel). Answer the questions.

1. You have to open the all-hands. Draft the ONE opening sentence. You cannot start with 'clean slate'.

2. The CEO wants to skip saying 'I'm sorry'. What do you say to her?

3. Write the ONE-line policy change you'd pin above every future review.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: regret or excuse?

1. REGRET — owns it, names the ONE thing.
2. EXCUSE — blames another team.
3. PLATITUDE — tells the team nothing.
4. EXCUSE — retros are for what YOU could have done.

Reading: Blameless post-mortems, and why most retros aren't one

1. (B) Given the same info and pressure, most reasonable people would have made the same call
2. (B) 'I wish' / 'if only' + past perfect
3. (B) The launch itself, factually, had that quality — it was hard to work on
4. (B) Is fuzzy and ongoing — no lesson tied to a specific decision

Vocabulary: -ed vs -ing adjectives, retro moves, hindsight phrases

1. exhausting
2. surprised
3. confusing
4. action item / learning
5. shout out
6. kicking the can down the road
1. The whole re-platform was exhausting — six months, three re-scopes, one exit.
2. I was genuinely surprised by how swiftly the team recovered from the outage.
3. That brief was confusing — I read it three times and still couldn't tell you the deliverable.
4. Big shout out to Priya — she rebuilt the pipeline over a weekend without being asked.
5. We keep kicking the can down the road on the pricing question — someone has to just make the call.

Grammar focus: I wish / If only + past perfect

1. had tested / 'd tested
2. had (past simple)
3. would stop
4. had pushed back
5. were / was (present regret)
1. Model: 'I wish I'd walked over to marketing in week one and asked for the brief myself, instead of waiting for it to arrive.'
2. Model: 'If only we'd made scope change #3 a formal re-negotiation, we wouldn't have absorbed it silently.'
3. Model: 'I wish we'd documented the migration a month earlier — losing one engineer shouldn't have stopped the whole project.'
4. Model: 'If only we'd re-run the pricing model in April instead of waiting until October — the signal was already there in Q2.'
1. confusing (quality of the announcement)
2. frustrated (my feeling)
3. disappointing (quality of the result)
4. exhausted (my feeling)
5. surprising (quality of the onboarding)

Listening: three retros, one failed launch

1. Voice B (Marta). Owns her part, uses 'I wish we'd...' twice with specific decisions, names ONE portable learning and ONE action item with an owner and a date.
2. Voice A (Jonas) — 'if only marketing had briefed us properly / if only sales had qualified better'. No regret about his own actions.
3. Voice C (Chichi) — 'we grew as a team, failure is fuel, we learned so much' — beautiful but no dated action, no owned mistake.
1. 'I wish we'd talked to five customers in early March, before we locked the scope in the April kick-off.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. 'No launch scope gets locked without five customer conversations in the two weeks before kick-off. It goes into the launch checklist tomorrow.'

3. 'Rafa updates the launch checklist by end of day Friday. I'll re-share it in Monday's all-hands.'

1. Owning your part first buys you the right to name what other teams could have done. Reverse the order and the room hears 'this is their fault, and by the way I was fine' — which shuts down every other lead in the room.

2. Every one of his 'if only's is about another team. If nothing he could have done differently would have changed the outcome, either he's not a leader on this project, or he's dodging. Neither is a good look at a company post-mortem.

3. A dated action item with an owner. 'We learned so much' with no 'X will do Y by Friday' turns every retro into a group hug that changes nothing. Insight without action is theatre.

Quiz

1. (B) wish / if only + past perfect
2. (B) had talked
3. (B) Two different meanings — quality of the thing vs my feeling
4. (B) Blames another team — no lesson the speaker can carry
5. (B) A portable rule + one action item = person + verb + date

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Retro vocabulary

1. hindsight
2. root cause
3. shout out
4. action item
5. own
6. post-mortem

Exercise 2 — Wish / if only

1. had tested / 'd tested
2. had
3. would stop
4. had pushed back
5. were / was
6. hadn't sent

Exercise 3 — -ed or -ing?

1. (A) confusing
2. (B) frustrated
3. (A) disappointing
4. (B) exhausted
5. (A) surprising

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the excuse as a regret

1. Model: 'I wish I'd walked over to marketing in week one and asked for the brief myself, instead of waiting.'
2. Model: 'If only we'd made scope change #3 a formal re-negotiation, we wouldn't have absorbed it silently.'
3. Model: 'I wish we'd documented the migration a month earlier — losing one engineer shouldn't have stopped the whole project.'
4. Model: 'If only we'd re-run the pricing model in April instead of October — the signal was there in Q2.'

Exercise 5 — Three retros, one failed launch

1. Voice B (Marta) — 'that's on me', specific 'I wish we'd talked to five customers in early March', portable learning + action item = person + verb + date.
2. Voice A (Jonas) — every 'if only' is about marketing or sales; no ownership.
3. Voice C (Chichi) — 'we grew so much / failure is fuel' — beautiful, but no dated action.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Northwind Payments

1. Model: 'What I care about is that Northwind is a place where the feedback you get is honest, specific, and grounded in facts you can check — and six weeks ago, we didn't meet that bar.'
2. Model: 'The team does not need us to be sorry — they need us to name what specifically went wrong. If you can say in one sentence that we approved a cycle that shouldn't have gone out in that form, the room will forgive the mistake. Skip it, and every improvement afterwards sounds defensive.'
3. Model: 'No rating goes out without at least two specific, dated behaviours the receiver can check — and no rating uses the phrase "some people have said" or any variant of it.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 6 · B6A

How we work here

Theme: Processes & Habits



Learning objectives

- Onboard a new hire to your team's way of working in under 15 minutes.
- Use *used to* / *be used to* / *get used to* correctly — three grammars, three meanings.
- Name the unwritten rules of your team, not just the written ones.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The one rule

Think about your current team (or your last one). In 45 seconds out loud: name ONE unwritten rule — the thing nobody documented but everyone knows ('we never Slack after 7pm', 'the CFO reads every deck twice before the meeting'). Then record a 30-second voice note.

The rule has to be UNWRITTEN — not in the handbook.

Say what a new hire would do WRONG in week one if nobody told them.

Was the rule good or bad? Would you keep it if you ran the team tomorrow?

Bonus: is there a rule you had to UN-learn from your last job to fit in here?

Lead-in: onboarding hits or misses

Rank 1 (best move) to 4 (biggest miss).

1. Manager sat side-by-side with the new hire for 3 mornings.

2. Manager sent a 40-page PDF and disappeared.

3. Manager introduced the new hire to 8 key people in 48h.

4. Manager said 'you'll pick it up' and vanished into meetings.

followUp: Which move would you steal for your next hire?

Side-by-side for 3 mornings

40-page PDF, no contact

Intros to 8 key people

'You'll pick it up' + vanished

Reading: The written rules, and the ones you actually need to know

Every team has two rulebooks. The written one — the wiki, the handbook, the onboarding deck — describes how the team says it works. The unwritten one — 'we never book meetings on Wednesdays', 'the CFO reads decks in the taxi before the meeting', 'reply-all is career suicide here' — describes how the team actually works. A good onboarding transfers both. A bad onboarding transfers only the first, and lets the new hire discover the second the hard way, over six embarrassing months.

The grammar of 'how we work here' sits on three phrases that look similar and mean three different things. 'I used to work in a corporate' means it was true in the past and isn't anymore. 'I'm used to working in open-plan offices' means I've adapted; it feels normal to me now. 'I'm still getting used to

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Slack replacing email' means I'm in the middle of adapting; it doesn't feel normal yet. New hires live in the third one for weeks — 'I'm still getting used to how you run stand-ups' — and the fastest way to shorten that phase is to name the norm explicitly rather than hope they absorb it.

The trap in onboarding is documentation theatre. A 40-page wiki nobody reads is worse than a 4-page one everybody does, because it lets managers off the hook: 'it's in the doc, they can look it up'. The best onboarders do the opposite — they treat every question the new hire asks as evidence that the doc failed, and they fix the doc that afternoon. A team where onboarding gets shorter every quarter is a team that's actually learning; a team where onboarding gets longer is a team that's confused about how it works.

1. The 'two rulebooks' idea is that every team has...
 - (A) A short one and a long one
 - (B) The written rules AND the unwritten ones — and good onboarding transfers both
 - (C) A rulebook for staff and one for managers
2. 'I used to work in a corporate' means...
 - (A) I still work there
 - (B) It was true in the past and isn't anymore
 - (C) I've adapted to it
3. 'I'm still getting used to Slack replacing email' means...
 - (A) Slack replaced email years ago
 - (B) I've fully adapted
 - (C) I'm in the middle of adapting — it doesn't feel normal yet
4. The reading criticises 'documentation theatre' because...
 - (A) Docs are always bad
 - (B) Nobody has time to write docs
 - (C) Long unread docs let managers off the hook and slow onboarding down

Vocabulary in context

Match the onboarding / process term to its plain-English meaning.

onboard (v.) — get a new hire up to speed on how the team works

ramp up — the period a new hire takes to reach full productivity

the runbook — the step-by-step guide for a repeatable process

single source of truth — the ONE place a fact lives — everywhere else references it

workflow — the ordered set of steps a piece of work goes through

handover — when work passes from one person / team to another

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Vocabulary: onboarding, workflows, unwritten rules

buddy (n.) — the peer assigned to answer a new hire's day-1 questions

shadowing — sitting alongside someone to observe how they actually do the work

day-in-the-life — a walk-through of what a typical Tuesday looks like in this role

ramp plan — the week-by-week plan for a new hire's first 30/60/90 days

pick something up — learn it informally, from watching / doing / asking

kick off (v.) / kick-off (n.) — the meeting that starts a project

spin up — start something quickly from nothing (a project, a team, a tool)

hand off (v.) / hand-off (n.) — pass the work to the next person / team

unblock someone — remove the one obstacle impeding their progress

loop someone in — include them in a thread / decision they need to see

the way we do things here — culture, dressed up as habit

unwritten rule — a norm everyone knows but nobody wrote down

sacred cow — a habit or ritual nobody questions — even when they should

read the room — match what you say / do to the energy in the room

muscle memory — a habit so ingrained you do it without thinking

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. Every new engineer is paired with a ____ for their first two weeks — someone senior they can ask anything.

2. The fastest way to learn how sales actually pitches is to ____ two calls with our best rep.

3. We ____ ____ the Q4 project on Monday — I need three people in the room.

4. Can you ____ Priya ____ on this thread? She'll have context.

5. Weekly-report-on-Friday is our ____ ____ — nobody's questioned it in three years.

6. Don't quote the CEO in the meeting — ____ ____ ____ first, it's a tense day.

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. Every new engineer is paired with a peer who answers day-one questions for their first two weeks.

2. The fastest way to learn how sales pitches is to sit alongside someone to observe them on two calls.

3. We start the project on Monday — I need three people in the room.

4. Can you include Priya in this thread? She'll have context.

5. Weekly-report-on-Friday is our habit nobody questions — nobody's questioned it in three years.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short memo to a new hire's manager summarising the onboarding plan for their first 30 days, including the unwritten rules they'll need to learn.

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: 30-Day Onboarding Plan — New Hire I'm proposing a ramp plan built around proximity, not documents. Week one: I'll shadow her through two client calls and loop her into the key Slack threads so she's not learning secondhand. She'll be paired with a buddy for day-to-day questions rather than a static wiki. We'll kick off with introductions to the eight people she'll actually work with, each with the unwritten rule attached ('Marc reads decks Sunday night'). I'm still getting used to how quickly our last two hires adapted this way — it's clearly faster than the 40-page PDF approach. Recommendation: adopt this ramp plan as the team default for every hire going forward.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar focus: used to / be used to / get used to

1. USED TO + infinitive — a past habit that isn't true anymore — 'I used to work in a corporate' → I don't now. 'I used to check email at 6am' → I don't anymore. Negative / question: 'I didn't use to...' / 'Did you use to...?' (drop the -d in speech / writing). Use for: past habits, past states, past routines that STOPPED.

2. BE USED TO + -ing / noun — you've adapted; it feels normal now — 'I'm used to working in open-plan offices' → it doesn't bother me. 'She's used to giving feedback in public' → it feels normal to her. Note the -ING (or a noun): 'I'm used to remote work' / 'I'm used to working remotely'. Use for: things that ARE part of your normal now, even if they were hard at first.

3. GET USED TO + -ing / noun — you're IN THE PROCESS of adapting — 'I'm getting used to Slack' → not normal yet, but I'm on the way. 'It took me three months to get used to the 7am stand-up.' → past process, completed. 'You'll get used to it' → future — you're not there yet, but you will be. Use for: the middle phase — after 'new' but before 'normal'.

4. Common traps — • 'I'm used to WORK in a corporate' ✗ → 'I used to work in a corporate' (past habit) OR 'I'm used to WORKING in a corporate' (adapted, still true). • 'I use to' ✗ → 'I used to' (past = -ed). • 'I'm used to work here' is a common Portuguese-speaker trap: you almost always mean 'I'm used to WORKING here' (I've adapted) OR 'I used to work here' (I don't anymore).

Exercise A — Choose the correct form

Fill in the blanks with *used to* / *be used to* / *get used to* in the correct form.

1. (Past habit, stopped) I ____ (check) Slack at 6am, but I stopped after the burnout.

2. (Adapted now) After six months here, I ____ ____ ____ (work) in an open-plan office.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. (In the process) She's only been here three weeks, so she ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ (adjust) to how fast we ship.

4. (Past habit, question) ____ you ____ ____ (work) in-office five days a week before the pandemic?

5. (Future — reassuring a new hire) Don't worry — you ____ ____ ____ ____ (get) our Monday stand-up format in a week or two.

Exercise B — Rewrite so the meaning is unambiguous

Rewrite each sentence using used to / be used to / get used to to match the meaning in brackets.

1. 'I worked in a big four consultancy for five years.' (...and I don't anymore)

2. 'Open-plan doesn't bother me.' (...because I've adapted)

3. 'The 7am stand-up was hard at first, but not anymore.' (...I've adapted)

4. 'Async communication is still weird to me.' (...in the process)

5. 'Reply-all was normal at my old job.' (...past habit)

Exercise C — 'What did you have to get used to?'

Answer each prompt in TWO sentences. Sentence 1: used to / be used to / get used to. Sentence 2: ONE unwritten rule you had to learn.

1. The last time you joined a new team, what did you have to GET USED TO in the first month?

2. What did you USED TO do at a previous job that would be wrong here?

3. What is one thing you're STILL GETTING USED TO — even now?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Listening: three managers, one new hire's first week

You're a Head of People. A new hire (Lena, hired for a strategy role) is finishing week one. You're deciding which of three team leads should own the ramp-up plan for future hires. Each of them ran a different onboarding this week. You're listening for who transferred the WRITTEN rules AND the unwritten ones — and who didn't.

pre

Which manager do you predict will land it — and what will land it?

What is ONE thing YOU had to 'get used to' in your first month at your current job that nobody told you about?

gist

1. Which manager ran the onboarding that actually worked, and why?

2. Which manager sent the 40-page doc and vanished?

3. Which manager was warm but overloaded her with a real project on Day 2, with no scaffolding?

detail

1. How many people did Priya personally introduce Lena to in the first 48 hours, and why those ones?

2. What was the ONE small deliverable Priya gave Lena on Day 3, and what was the safety net?

3. What did Tomas assume Lena would 'pick up as she went'?

Third listen — onboarding craft

Focus on HOW each manager designed the week. Answer from what they DID, not what they said.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Priya's onboarding is expensive — she blocked two full mornings and multiple 1:1s. Why is it still the cheapest of the three in the medium term?

2. Tomas's plan feels efficient ('here's the wiki, ping me') — what is he actually optimising for?

3. Kenji shipped a real deliverable in week one, which Priya also did. Why does Priya's version work and Kenji's doesn't?

Language from the audio — onboarding moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"I sat with her for the first two mornings, side-by-side." — proximity beats docs — signals investment in the human, not the wiki

"I introduced her to eight people in 48 hours — not the whole company, just the eight she'll actually work with." — targeted network map — she can ask for help by day three

"Marc reads decks Sunday night; get yours in by Friday afternoon." — names an unwritten rule out loud — kills six months of mis-timed work

"I sent her the wiki on Monday and told her to ping me with questions." — documentation theatre — the manager thinks this counts as onboarding

"If it's not right, that's on me for the brief, not on you." — explicit safety net — makes shipping in week one psychologically possible

"You'll pick it up as you go." — abdication dressed up as trust — she'll pick up the wrong things

Voice A (Tomas): Yeah, Lena's onboarding went great, I think. I sent her the wiki on Monday — it's really comprehensive, forty pages, everything's in there — and I told her to ping me with any questions. She had a couple of small ones early in the week. I've had back-to-back meetings all week, honestly, but she seems bright. She'll pick it up as she goes.

Voice B (Priya): OK. Week one for Lena. I blocked my calendar the first two mornings and sat with her side-by-side — literally next desk, laptops open, walking through how I actually structure my week. I introduced her personally to eight people in the first 48 hours — not the whole company, the specific eight she'll work with most in Q1. For each one I named the role AND the unwritten thing — 'Marc reads decks Sunday night, get yours in by Friday afternoon'. On Wednesday I gave her one small real deliverable — a one-page competitor teardown for Monday's leadership meeting — with an explicit line: 'if it's not right, it's on me for the brief, not on you'. I reviewed it Friday before it went out. She's ramping fast. I'd hire ten more of her.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice C (Kenji): Great week, actually! I threw her in the deep end — Day 2 she was already in front of a live client, which I think was really empowering. She's smart, she figured it out. I didn't do a buddy thing or a runbook, I just wanted her to feel trusted from day one. She shipped something small by Friday, which is great. She'll figure the rest out.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second onboarding walk-through

Solo task. Imagine a new hire starts on your team on Monday. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) giving them their first 15 minutes. You MUST include: (1) at least ONE 'used to / be used to / get used to' — used correctly, (2) TWO named unwritten rules of your team, (3) ONE named person they should meet in the first 48 hours + WHY, (4) ONE small deliverable they'll own in week one, (5) explicit permission to ask 'stupid' questions.

Scene: Your real next hire (recommended)

A: You're onboarding them.

B: Imagined listener: someone who's actually joining your team soon (or the last person who did).

Scene: A senior hire from a very different company

A: You're onboarding them.

B: Imagined listener: someone who spent 10 years at a big corporate and is joining your fast-moving team. They'll have to UN-learn a lot.

Scene: A junior hire, first real job

A: You're onboarding them.

B: Imagined listener: someone six months out of university — this is their first office job.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the one rule'

Now compress the whole onboarding to ONE unwritten rule — the ONE thing your new hire absolutely cannot get wrong in the first month. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'The ONE thing you have to get used to on this team is ____, because _____. Everything else you can figure out.'

Writing mini-task

Write the 4-sentence 'ramp plan' for a new hire's Week 1 (max 80 words). Sentence 1: who they sit next to. Sentence 2: three named people they meet in 48 hours. Sentence 3: ONE small deliverable they'll own by Friday. Sentence 4: ONE unwritten rule you'll name out loud on Day 1.

Wrap-up

One unwritten rule of your team you'll name out loud for the next new hire.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



One 'used to / be used to / get used to' distinction you'll stop mixing up.

One thing YOU had to un-learn from a previous job to fit in where you are now.

Quiz

1. 'I used to work in a corporate' means...
 - (A) I still do
 - (B) It was true in the past and isn't now
 - (C) I've adapted to it
2. 'I'm used to working remotely' means...
 - (A) I did it in the past
 - (B) I've adapted — it feels normal now
 - (C) I'm in the process of adapting
3. 'I'm still getting used to Slack replacing email' means...
 - (A) I've fully adapted
 - (B) I did it in the past
 - (C) I'm in the middle of adapting — not normal yet
4. 'I'm used to work here' is wrong because...
 - (A) 'used to' + infinitive is only for past habits; adapted meaning needs '-ing'
 - (B) 'work' should be 'works'
 - (C) It's a tense problem
5. The reading argues good onboarding transfers...
 - (A) Only the written rules
 - (B) Both the written rules AND the unwritten ones
 - (C) Only the unwritten ones

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Onboarding & workflow lexis

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

Word bank: buddy · shadow · kick off · loop ... in · sacred cow · read the room

1. Every new engineer is paired with a ____ for their first two weeks — someone senior they can ask anything.

2. The fastest way to learn how sales actually pitches is to ____ two calls with our best rep.

3. We ____ ____ the Q4 project on Monday — I need three people in the room.

4. Can you ____ Priya ____ on this thread? She'll have context.

5. Weekly-report-on-Friday is our ____ ____ — nobody's questioned it in three years.

6. Don't quote the CEO in the meeting — ____ ____ ____ first, it's a tense day.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a short proposal (120–180 words) for the Executive Committee regarding the overhaul of our current onboarding process. Argue for a shift from a 'manual' approach to a more structured 'ramp-up' model. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: *buddy*, *shadow*, *kick off*, *loop in*, *sacred cow*, or *read the room*.

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., 'Furthermore', 'Consequently', 'With respect to').

Structure clearly: Situation, Proposal, Expected Outcome.

model: Subject: Proposal for Enhancing Onboarding Efficiency To the Executive Committee, Our current onboarding process has long been a sacred cow within the organisation, yet it frequently fails to integrate new hires effectively. To address this, I propose we kick off a revised 'Ramp-Up' initiative starting Q3. Central to this shift is the formalisation of the buddy system. Rather than expecting new joiners to simply 'pick it up', they should shadow senior leads for their first 48 hours to observe decision-making in real-time. This exposure allows them to read the room and understand our unwritten rules before they are required to deliver. Furthermore, managers must ensure they loop in new hires on all relevant strategic threads immediately to prevent early-stage isolation. By moving away from a passive 'sink or swim' culture toward this structured proximity, we expect to see a 20% reduction in first-quarter attrition. This investment in the first week will pay dividends in long-term alignment and performance.

Exercise 2 — used to / be used to / get used to

Put the verb in the right form. Match the meaning in brackets.

1. (Past habit, stopped) I ____ (check) Slack at 6am, but I stopped after the burnout.

2. (Adapted now) After six months here, I ____ ____ ____ (work) in an open-plan office.

3. (In the process) She's only been here three weeks, so she's ____ ____ ____ (adjust) to how fast we ship.

4. (Past habit, question) ____ you ____ ____ (work) in-office five days a week before the pandemic?

5. (Future — reassuring a new hire) Don't worry — you ____ ____ ____ (get) our Monday stand-up format in a week or two.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



6. (Adapted now, negative) I ____ (be) interrupted every 20 minutes — I have to defend the mornings.

Exercise 3 — Onboarding hits or misses?

Classify each onboarding move: *HIT* (a great onboarding decision), *MISS* (a bad one) or *NEUTRAL* (depends).

1. Manager sat next to the new hire for the first three mornings.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL
2. Manager sent a 40-page welcome PDF on Day 1 and asked 'any questions?' on Day 5.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL
3. Manager introduced the new hire to 8 named colleagues in 48 hours.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL
4. Manager gave the new hire a real deliverable on Day 3, with no safety net.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL
5. Manager said 'you'll pick it up as you go' and disappeared into meetings for two weeks.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL
6. Manager blocked a daily 30-minute 'stupid questions welcome' slot for the whole first week.
(A) HIT
(B) MISS
(C) NEUTRAL

Exercise 4 — Name the unwritten rule

Rewrite each vague onboarding sentence into an *EXPLICIT* unwritten rule a new hire can act on Monday morning.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'People here are pretty flexible about hours.'

2. 'The CFO is a bit particular about decks.'

3. 'We're pretty async.'

4. 'Meetings are optional here.'

Exercise 5 — Three managers, one new hire's first week

You'll hear three team leads describe how they onboarded Lena in her first week. Decide who transferred both the written AND unwritten rules — and who didn't.

1. Which manager ran the onboarding that actually worked?

2. Which manager sent the wiki and vanished?

3. Which manager was warm but overloaded her on Day 2 with no scaffolding?

Voice A (Tomas): I sent her the wiki on Monday — it's really comprehensive, forty pages — and I told her to ping me with any questions. I've had back-to-back meetings all week. She seems bright, she'll pick it up as she goes.

Voice B (Priya): I blocked my calendar the first two mornings and sat with her side-by-side. I introduced her personally to eight people in 48 hours — not the whole company, the specific eight she'll work with in Q1. For each one I named the role and the unwritten thing — 'Marc reads decks Sunday night, get yours in by Friday'. On Wednesday I gave her a one-page teardown for Monday's leadership meeting, and I told her: 'if it's not right, that's on me for the brief, not on you'.

Voice C (Kenji): I threw her in the deep end — Day 2 she was in front of a live client. She's smart, she figured it out. No buddy, no runbook, just wanted her to feel trusted from day one. She shipped something small by Friday, which is great.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 6 — Write your Week-1 ramp plan

Imagine a new hire joins your team on Monday. Write the 4-sentence ramp plan (max 80 words). Sentence 1: who they sit next to. Sentence 2: three named people they meet in 48 hours. Sentence 3: ONE small deliverable they own by Friday. Sentence 4: ONE unwritten rule you'll name out loud on Day 1.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: onboarding hits or misses

1. Top — proximity beats any doc.
2. Bottom — no human contact, PDF unread.
3. Top — the network IS the onboarding.
4. Bottom — new hire picks up the wrong habits.

Reading: The written rules, and the ones you actually need to know

1. (B) The written rules AND the unwritten ones — and good onboarding transfers both
2. (B) It was true in the past and isn't anymore
3. (C) I'm in the middle of adapting — it doesn't feel normal yet
4. (C) Long unread docs let managers off the hook and slow onboarding down

Vocabulary: onboarding, workflows, unwritten rules

1. buddy
2. shadow
3. kick off
4. loop ... in
5. sacred cow
6. read the room
1. Every new engineer is paired with a buddy for their first two weeks.
2. The fastest way to learn how sales pitches is to shadow two calls.
3. We kick off the project on Monday — I need three people in the room.
4. Can you loop Priya in on this thread? She'll have context.
5. Weekly-report-on-Friday is our sacred cow — nobody's questioned it in three years.

Grammar focus: used to / be used to / get used to

1. used to check
2. 'm used to working
3. 's still getting used to adjusting / getting used to how fast
4. Did you use to work
5. 'll get used to
1. Model: 'I used to work in a big four consultancy for five years.' — or, if you want the habit sense: 'I used to work weekends in a big four consultancy.'
2. Model: 'I'm used to working in an open-plan office.'
3. Model: 'I got used to the 7am stand-up after about three weeks — now it's fine.'
4. Model: 'I'm still getting used to async communication — I keep expecting a real-time reply.'
5. Model: 'We used to reply-all on almost every internal thread at my old job — I had to un-learn it here.'
1. Model: 'I got used to the fact that decisions here happen in Slack threads, not meetings — nobody warned me. The unwritten rule was: if you don't react-emoji within 24 hours, the decision passes without you.'
2. Model: 'I used to CC my manager on every client email. Here that would look insecure — the unwritten rule is that you own your account and you flag risks up, you don't hide behind CCs.'
3. Model: 'I'm still getting used to how much people push back in writing here. The unwritten rule is that a comment on your doc isn't personal, it's respect — but I still flinch every time.'

Listening: three managers, one new hire's first week

1. Voice B (Priya). She sat with Lena for two mornings, introduced her to eight named people in 48 hours, named the unwritten rules out loud, and gave her one small real deliverable on Day 3 with permission to fail.
2. Voice A (Tomas) — 'I sent her the wiki on Monday, told her to ping me with questions' — no proximity, no intros, no unwritten rules named. Lena will 'get used to' the wrong things.
3. Voice C (Kenji) — great instinct on shipping early, but no buddy, no runbook, no time protected for shadowing. She'll ship something in week one, but she'll have picked up three bad habits by week three.
1. Eight — the specific people Lena would interact with most in her first quarter (not the whole company). She named each one's role AND the unwritten thing about working with them ('Marc reads decks Sunday night; get

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



yours in by Friday').

2. A 1-page competitor teardown for the Monday leadership meeting — real, useful, small. Safety net: Priya reviewed it Friday afternoon before it went out, and told Lena explicitly 'if it's not right, that's on me for the brief, not on you.'

3. How Slack channels are named, which meetings are optional, who actually makes decisions on the leadership team, and the fact that Wednesdays are protected no-meeting days. Four unwritten rules — all missed.

1. Because a new hire who understands how the team works by week 2 is productive by week 4. A new hire dumped into a wiki is productive by week 10 — if they don't quit first. Priya's two mornings save eight weeks of quiet mis-fit.

2. His own calendar this week. It's not onboarding; it's the illusion of onboarding. He'll pay for it in month three when Lena has quietly built the wrong mental model of half the team.

3. Priya paired the deliverable with a buddy, a review before it went out, and an explicit 'if it's not right, it's on me' safety net. Kenji's Day-2 project was 'here's a live client, go'. Same tactic; totally different psychological setup.

Quiz

1. (B) It was true in the past and isn't now
2. (B) I've adapted — it feels normal now
3. (C) I'm in the middle of adapting — not normal yet
4. (A) 'used to' + infinitive is only for past habits; adapted meaning needs '-ing'
5. (B) Both the written rules AND the unwritten ones

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Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Onboarding & workflow lexis

1. buddy
2. shadow
3. kick off
4. loop ... in
5. sacred cow
6. read the room

Exercise 2 — used to / be used to / get used to

1. used to check
2. 'm used to working
3. still getting used to adjusting
4. Did you use to work
5. 'll get used to
6. 'm not used to being

Exercise 3 — Onboarding hits or misses?

1. (A) HIT
2. (B) MISS
3. (A) HIT
4. (B) MISS
5. (B) MISS
6. (A) HIT

Exercise 4 — Name the unwritten rule

1. Model: 'Core hours are 10 to 4; outside that, you're free. But: don't Slack after 7pm — it looks bad, even if the receiver doesn't mind.'
2. Model: 'Marc (CFO) reads every deck Sunday night before the Monday meeting. Get yours into the shared folder by Friday afternoon — after that he'll only skim it in the room.'
3. Model: 'Async means: decisions live in written Slack threads, not meetings. If you don't react-emoji within 24 hours, the decision passes without you.'
4. Model: 'Meetings marked "optional" ARE optional — don't attend out of politeness. Meetings without "optional" in the title need a written pre-read from the organiser.'

Exercise 5 — Three managers, one new hire's first week

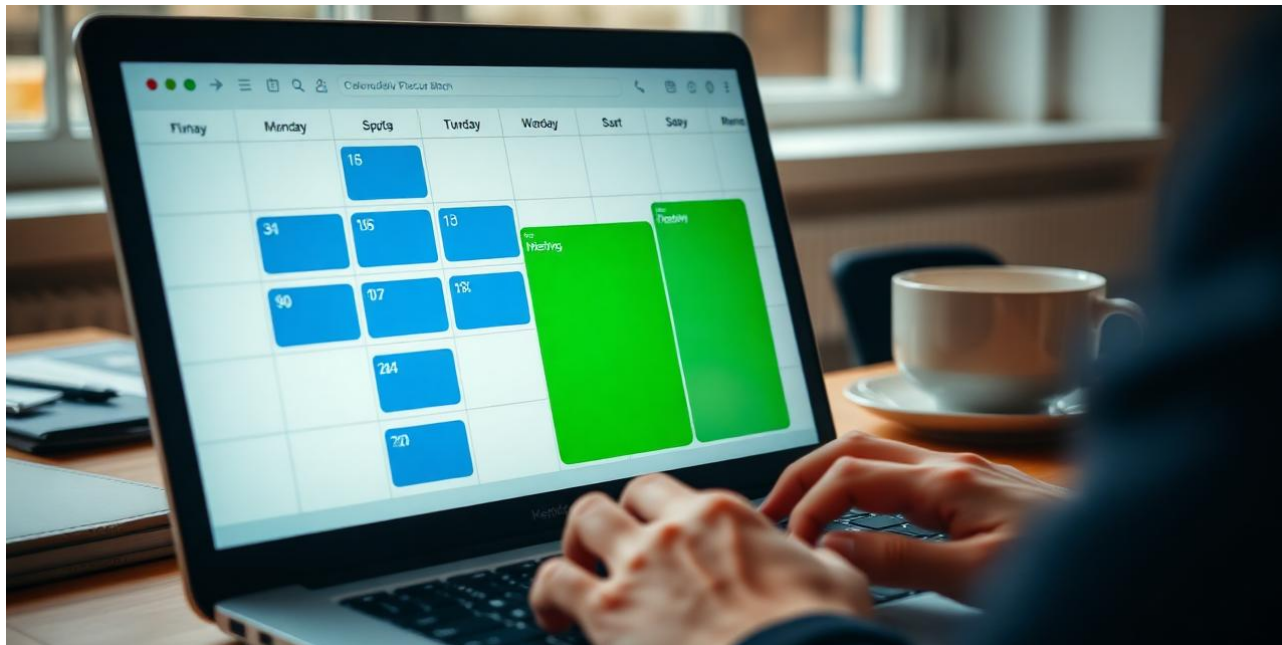
1. Voice B (Priya) — sat side-by-side, targeted intros to 8 named people, named unwritten rules ('Marc reads decks Sunday night'), small real deliverable with an explicit safety net.
2. Voice A (Tomas) — 'sent her the wiki, told her to ping me' — no proximity, no intros, no unwritten rules named.
3. Voice C (Kenji) — 'threw her in the deep end' — great instinct on shipping early, but no buddy, no runbook, no safety net.

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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.

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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

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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

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

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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



Unit 7 · B7A

Reading the room

Theme: *Negotiation*



Learning objectives

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The last time you lost

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

What was your ask (the POSITION)?

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

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

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

Lead-in: position or interest?

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

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

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

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

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

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

POSITION

INTEREST

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

1. POSITION is...

- (A) The reason behind the ask
- (B) The specific thing the other side says they want
- (C) Your fallback plan

2. INTEREST is...

- (A) The specific ask on the table
- (B) The reason behind the position — usually where the creative deal lives
- (C) The same as BATNA

3. 'She must have been briefed by the CFO' expresses...

- (A) Regret about a past action
- (B) Near certainty about a past event, based on evidence
- (C) A possible future action

4. A strong BATNA lets you...

- (A) Concede early
- (B) Be calm, patient and specific in the room — and walk away credibly
- (C) Avoid negotiating

Vocabulary in context

Match the negotiation term to its plain-English meaning.

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

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

BATNA — your best alternative if this deal falls apart

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

underlying motive — the genuine rationale behind the stated ask

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

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

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

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

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

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

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

6. That's below our _____ — we walk.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/expression from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. Don't take €40k as their final number — that's their initial number on the table.

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

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

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

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

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

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

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

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

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

Exercise A — Choose the correct past modal

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

Exercise B — Debrief the deal

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

1. 'They lied about the deadline.'

2. 'We asked for too little.'

3. 'She had another offer, obviously.'

4. 'We should have walked.'

Exercise C — Position, interest, past modal

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

pre

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

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

gist

1. Which speaker gets the promotion, and why?

2. Which speaker blames the client and learns nothing?

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

detail

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

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

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

Third listen — debrief craft

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

Language from the audio — post-deal moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

Scene: Your real recent deal (recommended)

A: You debrief.

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

Scene: A salary negotiation you were part of

A: You debrief.

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

Scene: A client / supplier renegotiation mid-project

A: You debrief.

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

Writing mini-task

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

Wrap-up

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

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

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

Quiz

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Negotiation lexis

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

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

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

2. Before you go in, know your ____ — otherwise you'll concede too early.

3. Give them a ____ - ____: let them win on payment terms while we win on price.

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

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

6. That's below our ____ — we walk.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

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

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

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

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

Structure clearly: Objective, Negotiation Strategy, Fallback Position.

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

Exercise 2 — Past modals

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 3 — Position or interest?

Decide whether each sentence expresses a POSITION or an INTEREST.

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

Exercise 4 — Debrief with past modals

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

1. 'They lied about the deadline.'

2. 'We asked for too little.'

3. 'She had another offer, obviously.'

4. 'We should have walked.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Three post-deal debriefs

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

1. Which speaker gets the promotion?

2. Which speaker blames the client and learns nothing?

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

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

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

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

Exercise 6 — Write your post-deal debrief

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: position or interest?

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. must have known
2. should have asked
3. might have been / may have been / could have been
4. can't have seen / couldn't have seen
5. shouldn't have offered
6. might have overridden / may have / could have
1. Model: 'The March 31st deadline might have been theatre — they never actually said what happened April 1st if we missed it.' (Speculation, not accusation — better in a written debrief.)
2. Model: 'We should have anchored higher — €50k, not €40k. Given how quickly they said yes, we must have been well below their reservation price.'
3. Model: 'She must have had another offer on the table — she didn't push back on any of our terms, which usually means she's already committed elsewhere.'
4. Model: 'Our BATNA was stronger than we treated it. We could have walked at the €35k mark — we still had the other pipeline. We shouldn't have felt as squeezed as we did.'
1. Model: 'Their POSITION was €40k; their INTEREST was almost certainly protecting their CFO's approved budget cap, not the value of the work. They must have already promised their boss a number under €45k — otherwise they'd have counter-offered at €42k, not held firm at €40k.'
2. Model: 'Their POSITION was Friday; their INTEREST was quarter-end revenue for their own team. They might have been bluffing on the 15% — end-of-quarter deadlines are often theatre — but they can't have been bluffing on wanting to close, or they wouldn't have given us the ultimatum in the first place.'
3. Model: 'Their POSITION was 'yes' at the number; their INTEREST was almost certainly title, team or a start date — not money. They should have negotiated — and the fact they didn't means we might have anchored the offer too low. We could have paid another 10% and still had the deal.'

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



promise to the board'), and names our own BATNA failure ('we treated the deal as our only option — it wasn't').

2. Voice A (Ravi). 'They lied about the budget / they never intended to sign with us' — accusations, no past modals, no interest analysis. The client is the villain, so there's nothing WE could have done. Useless for the next deal.

3. Voice C (Kwame) — 'we probably should have done more, we could have been sharper, honestly it's on all of us'. Sounds humble, but names no specific mistake, no interest, no past modal used precisely. The debrief produces no lesson.

1. POSITION: '€260k or we go with the competitor.' INTEREST (per Marta): the CFO had promised the board a specific number under €270k, so the €260k wasn't about value — it was about the CFO not losing face in front of the board. Marta's evidence: the client never pushed back on scope, only on price, and they went silent for 48 hours after we offered €275k — 'she must have been re-briefing her CFO'.

2. 'They MUST HAVE ALREADY AGREED internally on the €260k number before our second call — otherwise the CFO wouldn't have gone silent for 48 hours. We SHOULD HAVE ASKED for their budget cap in the discovery call, not tried to guess it in the offer. And we COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN they were talking to the competitor — but we SHOULD HAVE ASSUMED they were.'

3. 'We treated this deal as our only option in Q4. It wasn't — we had three other late-stage deals. We negotiated like we had no BATNA, so they smelled it. The €260k floor should have been our walk-away point, not our concession point.' Ravi blames the client; Kwame is vague; only Marta names OUR strategic error.

1. Certainty and precision as separate things. 'They must have already agreed' = high certainty from evidence. 'We couldn't have known about the competitor' = accurate about what was and wasn't possible with the information at the time. 'We should have asked for their budget' = actionable regret. Ravi flattens all three into 'they lied' and Kwame flattens all three into 'we could have done more'. Neither produces a lesson.

2. It teaches the team the wrong lesson. If the client is always the villain, the team's mental model of losing becomes 'they were bad-faith' — not 'we misread the interest'. The team stops learning to read the room, because the room is 'unfair'. Two more quarters of this and the team can't diagnose losses at all.

3. Because a CRO can't act on it. 'We could have been sharper' — where? On price? On timing? On BATNA framing? Vague self-blame absorbs the guilt but produces no next-Monday change. Marta names the specific move ('anchor the discovery call around their budget cap'); Kwame names none. Vague humility is a form of avoiding the diagnosis.

Quiz

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Negotiation lexis

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

Exercise 2 — Past modals

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

Exercise 3 — Position or interest?

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

Exercise 4 — Debrief with past modals

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

Exercise 5 — Three post-deal debriefs

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 7 · B7B

Closing the deal

Theme: Negotiation



Learning objectives

- Close a negotiation on clear, written next steps — not on 'good vibes'.
- Use verbs of the senses and reporting phrases to describe what you saw and heard in the room.
- Use silence as a tool, not a mistake — and know the difference between a trade-off and a concession.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The last time you didn't close

Think of a negotiation that *ENDED* well in the room but never actually closed — no signed contract, no follow-through, no next step. In 45 seconds out loud: what happened between 'we agreed in the room' and 'nothing happened'? Then record a 30-second voice note about what you'd do differently.

Was there a specific NEXT STEP with a name and a date — or just 'let's follow up'?

Who OWNED the follow-up — you, them, or 'someone'?

Did anything get written down before people left the room?

Bonus: did you make a concession without asking for anything in return? (That's the pattern.)

Lead-in: concession or trade-off?

Decide: *CONCESSION* (gave, got nothing) or *TRADE-OFF* (gave, got something in return).

1. 'OK, we can do €38k instead of €40k. Let's just get this signed.'

2. 'We can do €38k IF you sign for 24 months instead of 12.'

3. 'Sure, we can include the training package.'

4. 'I can waive the setup fee IF we lock the price for two years.'

followUp: In your last three deals, how many concessions were meant to be trade-offs?

CONCESSION

TRADE-OFF

Reading: Close on writing, not on feeling

The most expensive words in negotiation are 'we'll follow up on the details'. Rooms feel warm at the end of a good meeting; smiles are exchanged, hands are shaken, and everyone leaves believing the deal is done. Then the follow-up email never lands, the details drift, the priorities of week two swallow it, and six weeks later nobody's quite sure what was agreed. The close of a negotiation is not the handshake — the close is the written summary that lands within 60 minutes of the meeting ending, with named next steps, named owners, named dates, and any concession explicitly tied to what was received in return. If it isn't in the email, it wasn't in the room.

The grammar for describing what you saw and heard in the room is verbs of the senses and reporting phrases. 'She SEEMED reluctant on the payment terms' — you saw hesitation, not a hard no. 'He APPEARED to be checking with someone off-screen' — visual evidence, honest inference. 'She SOUNDED unsure when we raised the March deadline' — auditory, not psychological. 'They DIDN'T

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COMMIT to a number, but they DIDN'T PUSH BACK either' — precise reporting of what happened, not what you wished had happened. These verbs — SEEM, APPEAR, SOUND, LOOK, FEEL — plus reporting frames like 'they STOPPED SHORT OF agreeing to...', 'she IMPLIED that...', 'he DENIED that...' — are what separates a useful debrief email from a rosy one.

The third tool most people never learn is silence. When you make an offer, or you counter, or you say 'that doesn't work for us', the temptation is to keep talking — to soften, to explain, to fill the gap. Don't. The single most powerful move in a negotiation is to stop talking after your position lands, and let the other side speak next. Silence puts the burden of the next move on them, which almost always produces information — a concession, a counter, or the interest behind their position. Amateurs fill the silence and negotiate against themselves. Professionals count to twelve in their head and wait.

1. The 'close' of a negotiation is really...
 - (A) The handshake
 - (B) The written summary within an hour, with named next steps and owners
 - (C) The moment of verbal agreement
2. 'She seemed reluctant on the payment terms' is a good debrief line because...
 - (A) It's warm and diplomatic
 - (B) It reports what you observed — hesitation, not a hard no — without inventing an inner state
 - (C) It commits to a next step
3. The trick with silence in negotiation is...
 - (A) Never use it — it's rude
 - (B) Fill it quickly to keep the room warm
 - (C) Stop talking after your position lands and let the other side speak next — silence produces information
4. A CONCESSION differs from a TRADE-OFF in that...
 - (A) A trade-off is bigger
 - (B) In a concession you give something up for nothing named in return; in a trade-off you give X in exchange for Y
 - (C) They're synonyms

Vocabulary in context

Match the closing / reporting term to its plain-English meaning.

next steps — the named actions with owners and dates that follow a meeting

action item — one specific thing one specific person will do by one specific date

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

concession — you give something up without a named return — value bleed

recap email — the written summary of what was agreed, sent within an hour

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



the silent close — stop talking after your position lands; let the other side move first

Vocabulary: closing, concessions, silence, reporting

close (v.) the deal — reach a signed, written agreement — not just a handshake

circle back on X — revisit a specific open point (careful — often means 'never')

lock in (a term) — get it agreed and written down, no more moving

green-light (v.) — get formal approval to proceed

sign on the dotted line — the actual signature — the only real close

trade-off (n.) — give X to get Y — both sides move

concession (n.) — give X for nothing named in return

give ground — shift from a position, usually a small margin

hold the line — refuse to move on a specific term

package deal — several terms agreed together, not one at a time

seem / appear / sound / look — verbs of the senses — describe what you observed, not what you inferred

she implied that... — she didn't say it explicitly, but she signalled it

he stopped short of... — he almost said / did something, but didn't quite

they denied that... — they explicitly refuted the claim

they didn't commit to a number — no specific figure was given — flag it explicitly in the recap

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. The room felt great, but until we _____, nothing is closed.

2. Let's not do this one term at a time — I'll come back with a _____ tomorrow morning.

3. On payment terms we can move; on price we _____.

4. She _____ agreeing, but she wouldn't put a date on it — flag it in the recap.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. He ____ that the March 31st deadline was flexible — not out loud, but the phrasing was 'ideally by end of Q1'.

6. Let's ____ the SLA before people leave the room — I don't want it drifting into next week.

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 room felt great, but until we <u>get the signature on the contract</u>, nothing is closed.

2. Let's not do this term by term — I'll come back with <u>several terms agreed together</u> tomorrow.

3. On payment terms we can move; on price we <u>refuse to move</u>.

4. She <u>almost agreed but didn't quite</u> confirming the date — flag it in the recap.

5. Let's <u>get it agreed and written down</u> before people leave the room.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a recap memo to a client following a closing call, naming the trade-offs agreed and the next steps with owners and dates.

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: Recap — Closing Call Our number is €38k, in exchange for a 24-month term rather than 12 — a trade-off, not a concession. You seemed open to this once we walked through the total value over two years. On the March 31st go-live, you stopped short of confirming the date, so I'm flagging it as an open item rather than assuming agreement. We held the line on price but agreed to include the training package in exchange for permission to publish a joint case study post-launch. Next step: I'll send the contract draft by Wednesday 5pm; please confirm the go-live date and training/case-study trade by Friday noon. Recommendation: let's lock in these terms this week so contracting has a full month before go-live.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar focus: Verbs of the senses & reporting phrases

1. SEEM / APPEAR — inference from what you observed — 'She SEEMED reluctant on the March date.' — you observed hesitation. 'He APPEARED to be checking with someone off-screen.' — visual inference. Grammar: SEEM + adjective ('seemed reluctant') OR SEEM + to-infinitive ('seemed to hesitate'). APPEAR follows the same pattern. Difference from 'She was reluctant': SEEM softens the claim to an inference from evidence — safer in written debriefs where you can't prove the inner state.

2. LOOK / SOUND / FEEL — direct sense evidence — 'She LOOKED unsure.' — visual only. 'He SOUNDED confident on the price.' — auditory only. 'The room FELT tense after the ultimatum.' — atmosphere. Grammar: LOOK / SOUND / FEEL + adjective (no 'to be'): ✓ 'she looks tired'; ✗ 'she looks to be tired'. With 'like' + noun/clause: 'It sounded LIKE a bluff' / 'she looked LIKE she'd already decided'.

3. Reporting frames — say what happened WITHOUT quoting — 'She IMPLIED THAT the budget was fixed.' — signalled, didn't say. 'He DENIED THAT they were talking to a competitor.' — explicit no. 'They STOPPED SHORT OF agreeing.' — almost, but not quite. 'She DIDN'T COMMIT TO a specific date.' — no figure given. 'He ADMITTED THAT the deadline was arbitrary.' — conceded, unexpectedly. Use these in written recaps to preserve nuance — a promise is not an implication, and a denial is not a hedge.

4. Common traps — • 'She SEEM tired' ✗ → 'she SEEMS / SEEMED tired'. Third-person -s or past -ed. • 'It LOOKS TO BE a bluff' ✗ → 'it looks LIKE a bluff' (with 'like' for noun clauses). • 'He REFUSED to answer' vs 'he DENIED that they were bluffing' — DENY takes a that-clause of a specific claim; REFUSE takes a to-infinitive of an action.

Exercise A — Choose the correct sense verb / reporting frame

Complete each debrief sentence with ONE of: seemed / appeared / sounded / looked / felt / implied / denied / stopped short of / didn't commit to.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. She ____ reluctant when we raised the March 31st deadline.

2. He ____ to be checking his phone under the table — probably briefing his CFO.

3. The room ____ tense as soon as we quoted €280k.

4. She ____ that they were already talking to the competitor — she just said 'we're exploring options'.

5. He ____ any conversation about the budget cap — flag it in the recap.

6. They ____ ____ ____ a specific date; only 'ideally end of Q1'.

Exercise B — Rewrite as an honest debrief sentence

Rewrite each over-claim into a defensible debrief sentence using sense verbs / reporting frames.

1. 'She agreed to the March deadline.'

2. 'They lied about being in talks with the competitor.'

3. 'He'll accept €38k.'

4. 'She was bluffing about walking away.'

Exercise C — Draft the recap email

You just left a meeting where: they seemed open to €38k, they didn't confirm the March 31st date, and they implied they'd close by Friday if the training package is included. Draft the recap email (max 90 words). It MUST include: (1) a sense verb ('seemed'/'appeared'/'sounded'), (2) 'stopped short of' or 'didn't commit to' for the unresolved item, (3) at least ONE explicit trade-off ('X in exchange for Y'), (4) a named next step with an owner and a date.

1. Draft the email.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Listening: three attempts to close the same €38k deal

Three of your reps are running the same close call — the client, Ana, has said 'we like it, let's see if we can find a number that works'. You're listening to who actually closes: who names the trade-off, who uses silence, and who talks the deal into a concession.

pre

Which speaker do you predict will close on a trade-off, and which will close on a concession?

Think about your last close call. Did you make a trade-off or a concession on the last €2–5k?

gist

1. Which rep closes properly, and how?

2. Which rep closes on 'good vibes' — no written next step, no owner?

3. Which rep talks the deal into a €2k concession by filling the silence?

detail

1. What EXACTLY is Priya's close — the words, the order?

2. What are the EXACT words Kwame uses that turn his €38k into €36k?

3. What does Tomás explicitly say instead of naming a next step?

Third listen — closing craft

Focus on *HOW* each rep uses silence and reporting. Answer from what they *DO*, not what they say.

1. Priya stops talking after '€38k on a 24-month term'. What work is her silence doing?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Kwame doesn't just concede €2k — the way he concedes teaches Ana something. What?

3. Tomás's 'let's circle back' feels harmless. Why is it the most expensive line in the whole call?

Language from the audio — closing moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"Our number is €38k, on a 24-month term." [then silence] — makes the offer, uses silence to put the next move on them — produces information

"I'll send the recap in 30 minutes — you confirm by Friday noon, I contract Monday." — named next step, named owner, named date — converts the verbal into the written close

"On price we can move; on term length we hold the line." — makes the trade explicit — where you'll flex and where you won't

"Sounds like we're aligned, let's circle back next week." — verbal-only close with no written commitment — the deal is now unstated

"Our number is €38k... I mean, we've done €36k for similar accounts if that helps." — negotiate against yourself — move on price before they've responded

"Happy to include training IF we can announce this as a joint case study." — trade-off — scope for marketing rights, both sides move

Voice A (Tomás): So — yeah, this has been a great chat, I really feel like we're aligned on the value here. On the number, I know you're looking around €35–36k, we're around €40k, so we're not that far off. Let's circle back next week and see where we land on the exact figure — I'm sure we can find something that works for both sides. Thanks so much for your time today, really enjoyed it.

Voice B (Priya): OK Ana. I've heard your side. Our number is €38k, on a 24-month term. [pause] ... Yeah, I hear you on the length — 12 months would be your preference. On price we can move; on term length we hold the line. The €38k is contingent on 24 months. [pause] ... OK. Then we have a deal on the core. Great. Two things. On the March 31st go-live, you didn't commit to the date on this call — you said 'ideally end of Q1' — so I'm flagging that as an open item; we'll re-raise Thursday. On the training package: happy to include, in exchange for permission to publish this as a joint case study post-launch. I'll send the recap in the next 30 minutes with the number, the term, and both open items. You confirm by Friday noon; I'll get contracting to draft by Monday morning. Sound good?

Voice C (Kwame): OK, so, our number is €38k — I mean, that's where we'd like to be, obviously if that's tough we've got some flexibility, we've done €36k for similar-size accounts, so, you know, that could be a starting point too, if it helps. Um. What are you thinking? Yeah? OK yeah €36k works, let's go with that. I'll send something over at some point this week — great to chat!

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second close

Solo task. Pick ONE deal you're currently in the middle of — a client, a supplier, a salary, a project. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) delivering the close. You MUST include: (1) an OFFER stated in ONE sentence and then SILENCE — say '[pause]' out loud, (2) ONE explicit TRADE-OFF ('X in exchange for Y' — not a concession), (3) at least ONE sense verb / reporting frame ('you seemed...', 'you didn't commit to...', 'you implied...'), (4) a named NEXT STEP with an owner, a date, and a promise of a recap email within an hour.

Scene: Your real live deal (recommended)

A: You close.

B: Imagined listener: the actual counterparty.

Scene: A salary / role negotiation

A: You close.

B: Imagined listener: the hiring manager, at the end of the third conversation.

Scene: A mid-project supplier renegotiation

A: You close.

B: Imagined listener: the supplier's account manager, after two weeks of back-and-forth.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the silent close'

Compress the whole close to ONE offer + silence + ONE trade + ONE next step. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: '[Offer]. [pause 3 seconds]. Happy to [X] in exchange for [Y]. Recap in your inbox within the hour; you confirm by [date/time].' Say it out loud — including the silence.

Writing mini-task

Draft the recap email for a deal you just closed verbally (max 90 words). It MUST include: (1) the AGREED terms — numbers and dates, explicitly, (2) ONE unresolved item flagged with a sense verb / reporting frame ('you seemed comfortable with X but stopped short of confirming'), (3) any TRADE-OFF made ('X in exchange for Y'), (4) ONE named next step with an owner and a date.

Wrap-up

One CONCESSION you made recently that should have been a TRADE-OFF — what would the trade have been?

One sense verb or reporting frame you'll use in your next debrief email ('she seemed...', 'he stopped short of...').

One deal you'll re-close with a recap email today — because it was closed on 'good vibes', not on writing.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Quiz

1. The real 'close' of a deal is...
 - (A) The handshake in the room
 - (B) The written recap within an hour with named next steps and owners
 - (C) The moment of verbal agreement
2. 'She seemed reluctant on the March deadline' is a good debrief line because...
 - (A) It commits to a next step
 - (B) It reports what was observed without inventing an inner state
 - (C) It's a hard no
3. A TRADE-OFF differs from a CONCESSION in that...
 - (A) A trade-off is bigger
 - (B) In a trade-off both sides move; in a concession only you do — value bleed
 - (C) They mean the same thing
4. The right use of silence after your offer is...
 - (A) Fill it fast to keep the room warm
 - (B) Stop talking; let the other side speak next — silence produces information
 - (C) Never use silence — it's rude
5. 'They didn't commit to a specific date' should appear in a recap because...
 - (A) It's polite
 - (B) It preserves the fact that no date was agreed — protects both sides from later misremembering
 - (C) It's a deal-breaker

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Closing & reporting lexis

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

Word bank: sign on the dotted line · package deal · hold the line · stopped short of · implied · lock in

1. The room felt great, but until we _____, nothing is closed.

2. Let's not do this one term at a time — I'll come back with a _____ tomorrow.

3. On payment terms we can move; on price we _____.

4. She _____ agreeing, but wouldn't put a date on it — flag it in the recap.

5. He _____ that the March 31st deadline was flexible — his phrasing was 'ideally by end of Q1'.

6. Let's _____ the SLA before people leave the room — I don't want it drifting.

Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a post-negotiation debrief (120–180 words) for the Sales Director regarding a major deal with a key client. Summarize what happened and the next steps to close. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: sign on the dotted line, package deal, hold the line, stopped short of, implied, or lock in.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, reporting register.

Use reporting frames (e.g., 'It was observed that', 'The client indicated').

Structure clearly: Summary of Meeting, Outstanding Issues, Recommended Action.

model: Subject: Debrief on Meridian Print Negotiation To the Sales Director, The final session with Meridian Print provided several key insights. While the client implied they were comfortable with the proposed value, they stopped short of a definitive commitment during the live discussion. To lock in the agreement by Friday, I recommend we present a package deal that includes the additional training credits they requested, provided they agree to a 24-month term. We must hold the line on the core unit price, as any further concession there would erode our margins for the entire fiscal year. Once the updated terms are sent, I will follow up personally to ensure they are ready to sign on the dotted line. This deal represents a significant milestone for our regional growth, and securing it this week is critical for our Q4 targets.

Exercise 2 — Sense verbs & reporting frames

Complete each sentence with *ONE* of: *seemed / appeared / sounded / felt / implied / denied / stopped short of / didn't commit to*.

1. She ____ reluctant when we raised the March 31st deadline.

2. He ____ to be checking his phone under the table — probably briefing his CFO.

3. The room ____ tense as soon as we quoted €280k.

4. She ____ they were talking to the competitor — she just said 'we're exploring options'.

5. He ____ any conversation about the budget cap.

6. They ____ ____ ____ a specific date; only 'ideally end of Q1'.

Exercise 3 — Concession or trade-off?

Decide whether each closing move is a *CONCESSION* (value bleed) or a *TRADE-OFF* (both sides move).

1. 'OK, we can do €38k instead of €40k. Let's just get this signed.'

(A) CONCESSION

(B) TRADE-OFF

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. 'We can do €38k IF you sign for 24 months instead of 12.'
(A) CONCESSION
(B) TRADE-OFF
3. 'Sure, we can include the training package.'
(A) CONCESSION
(B) TRADE-OFF
4. 'We can include the training package IF we can announce it as a joint case study.'
(A) CONCESSION
(B) TRADE-OFF
5. 'Fine, I'll waive the setup fee.'
(A) CONCESSION
(B) TRADE-OFF
6. 'I can waive the setup fee IF we lock the price for two years.'
(A) CONCESSION
(B) TRADE-OFF

Exercise 4 — Rewrite as an honest debrief

Rewrite each over-claim into a defensible debrief sentence using sense verbs / reporting frames.

1. 'She agreed to the March deadline.'

2. 'They lied about the competitor.'

3. 'He'll accept €38k.'

4. 'She was bluffing about walking away.'

Exercise 5 — Three attempts to close the same €38k deal

You'll hear three reps try to close the same deal with Ana. Decide who closes properly, who closes on 'good vibes', and who talks the deal into a concession.

1. Which rep closes properly?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Which rep closes on 'good vibes'?

3. Which rep talks the deal into a €2k concession by filling silence?

Voice A (Tomás): This has been a great chat — I feel like we're aligned on value. On the number, we're around €40k, you're around €35–36k, so we're not far off. Let's circle back next week and see where we land. Thanks so much!

Voice B (Priya): OK Ana. Our number is €38k, on a 24-month term. [pause] I hear you on the length. On price we can move; on term length we hold the line. The €38k is contingent on 24 months. [pause] OK — deal on the core. On the March 31st go-live: you didn't commit today, only 'ideally end of Q1' — flagging as open. On the training package: happy to include, in exchange for permission to publish this as a joint case study. Recap in 30 minutes; you confirm by Friday noon; contracting drafts Monday.

Voice C (Kwame): Our number is €38k — I mean, that's where we'd like to be, obviously if that's tough we've done €36k for similar accounts, so, you know, that could be a starting point too... Um. What are you thinking? Yeah? OK, €36k works. Let's go with that.

Exercise 6 — Draft the recap email

You just left a meeting where: they seemed open to €38k, they didn't confirm the March 31st date, and they implied they'd close by Friday if training is included. Draft the recap email (max 90 words). It MUST include: (1) a sense verb, (2) 'stopped short of' or 'didn't commit to', (3) ONE explicit trade-off, (4) a named next step with owner and date.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Meridian Print

Think about the Meridian Print case (12-month contract, they want +22%, you have 6 months and a big pitch in 5 weeks). Answer the questions.

1. What SPECIFIC BATNA data do you need before Thursday's call — and how do you get it in 48 hours?

2. Cristina's POSITION is +22%. What's her likely INTEREST — and where's the creative deal?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Draft the OPENING of your Thursday call — the first 3 sentences.

4. You reach +8% for 6 months IN EXCHANGE FOR a 12-month extension. Draft the 60-word recap.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: concession or trade-off?

1. CONCESSION — €2k for nothing.
2. TRADE-OFF — €2k for revenue certainty.
3. CONCESSION — added scope for free.
4. TRADE-OFF — real return for the concession.

Reading: Close on writing, not on feeling

1. (B) The written summary within an hour, with named next steps and owners
2. (B) It reports what you observed — hesitation, not a hard no — without inventing an inner state
3. (C) Stop talking after your position lands and let the other side speak next — silence produces information
4. (B) In a concession you give something up for nothing named in return; in a trade-off you give X in exchange for Y

Vocabulary: closing, concessions, silence, reporting

1. sign on the dotted line
 2. package deal
 3. hold the line
 4. stopped short of
 5. implied
 6. lock in
1. The room felt great, but until we sign on the dotted line, nothing is closed.
 2. Let's not do this term by term — I'll come back with a package deal tomorrow.
 3. On payment terms we can move; on price we hold the line.
 4. She stopped short of confirming the date — flag it in the recap.
 5. Let's lock in the SLA before people leave the room.

Grammar focus: Verbs of the senses & reporting phrases

1. seemed / appeared / sounded / looked
 2. appeared / seemed
 3. felt
 4. implied
 5. denied / stopped short of
 6. didn't commit to
1. Model: 'She SEEMED comfortable with the March deadline but STOPPED SHORT OF confirming it — she said "ideally by end of Q1". Flag as an open item; not yet locked in.'
 2. Model: 'They DENIED being in active talks with the competitor, but she IMPLIED they were "exploring options". Treat as high probability, not certainty; price the offer accordingly.'
 3. Model: 'He APPEARED open to €38k — his tone SOUNDED softer once we mentioned the 24-month term — but he DIDN'T COMMIT to the number in writing. Recap explicitly with €38k conditional on 24-month lock-in.'
 4. Model: 'Her walk-away threat SOUNDED LIKE a bluff — she stayed in the room for another 30 minutes and kept pushing on scope, which she wouldn't do if she were actually leaving. We SHOULD HAVE let the silence sit longer to test it.'
1. Model: 'Subject: Recap — pricing, deadline, training package\n\nQuick recap. On price: you SEEMED open to €38k, conditional on a 24-month term (not 12). We'll confirm in writing tomorrow. On the March 31st go-live: you DIDN'T COMMIT to the date and asked for "ideally end of Q1" — we've flagged this as open and will re-raise Thursday. On the training package: happy to include, IN EXCHANGE FOR permission to publish a joint case study post-launch. Next step: I'll send the revised paper by Wednesday 5pm; you confirm the training / case-study trade by Friday noon. — Marta.'

Listening: three attempts to close the same €38k deal

1. Voice B (Priya). Names the trade explicitly ('€38k in exchange for a 24-month term'), uses silence after her offer, sends the recap email within an hour with named owners and dates, and doesn't drop scope for free.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Voice A (Tomás). Ends the call with 'sounds like we're aligned, let's circle back next week'. No number confirmed, no date, no owner, no email. Six weeks from now nobody will remember what was agreed.
3. Voice C (Kwame). Makes the offer, then keeps talking — softens, explains, and eventually says 'or we could do €36k if that helps' before Ana has even responded. Classic 'negotiate against yourself'.
1. 'Our number is €38k, on a 24-month term.' 2. Silence — she stops talking. 3. Ana pushes back on the term length; Priya holds. 4. Ana accepts. 5. Priya immediately: 'Great — I'll send the recap in the next 30 minutes with the number, the term, and the March 31st go-live as an open item. You confirm by Friday noon; I'll get contracting to draft by Monday.' Named next step, named owner, named date. That's the close.
2. 'Our number is €38k... I mean, that's where we'd like to be... obviously if that's tough, we've got some flexibility, we've done €36k for similar-size accounts, so... you know, that could be a starting point too, if it helps.' — he moves €2k before Ana has said a word. He negotiated against himself in his own opening.
3. 'Great chat, sounds like we're aligned, let's circle back next week and see where we land.' No number, no date, no owner, no email committed to. 'Circle back' is the death-rattle of an unclosed deal.
1. Two things at once. (1) It puts the burden of the next move on Ana — Ana has to either accept, counter, or explain — all of which produce information. (2) It signals that Priya is comfortable with the number; comfortable people don't fill silence. Kwame's continued talking signals discomfort with his own price, which invites push-back.
2. That the €38k was a soft number, and that Kwame moves when he's uncomfortable, not when Ana pushes. Ana now knows: (a) she can get more by pushing gently, (b) any Kwame concession will come without a return ask. This one call will cost Kwame's team on every subsequent Kwame deal for the next 12 months, because Ana will tell her network.
3. Because it converts the 45 minutes of momentum from the room into zero written commitment. Next week Ana is in different meetings with different priorities. The deal is now competing with everything else on her plate, and 'you agreed with me on the call' has no evidentiary weight without an email. The close was verbal; the deal is unstated.

Quiz

1. (B) The written recap within an hour with named next steps and owners
2. (B) It reports what was observed without inventing an inner state
3. (B) In a trade-off both sides move; in a concession only you do — value bleed
4. (B) Stop talking; let the other side speak next — silence produces information
5. (B) It preserves the fact that no date was agreed — protects both sides from later misremembering

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Closing & reporting lexis

1. sign on the dotted line
2. package deal
3. hold the line
4. stopped short of
5. implied
6. lock in

Exercise 2 — Sense verbs & reporting frames

1. seemed / appeared / sounded
2. appeared / seemed
3. felt
4. implied
5. denied / stopped short of
6. didn't commit to

Exercise 3 — Concession or trade-off?

1. (A) CONCESSION
2. (B) TRADE-OFF
3. (A) CONCESSION
4. (B) TRADE-OFF
5. (A) CONCESSION
6. (B) TRADE-OFF

Exercise 4 — Rewrite as an honest debrief

1. Model: 'She SEEMED comfortable with the March deadline but STOPPED SHORT OF confirming it — she said "ideally end of Q1". Flag as open; not yet locked in.'
2. Model: 'They DENIED being in active talks with the competitor, but she IMPLIED they were "exploring options". Treat as high probability, not certainty.'
3. Model: 'He APPEARED open to €38k — his tone SOUNDED softer once we mentioned the 24-month term — but he DIDN'T COMMIT to the number in writing. Recap €38k conditional on 24-month lock-in.'
4. Model: 'Her walk-away threat SOUNDED LIKE a bluff — she stayed 30 more minutes and kept pushing on scope, which she wouldn't do if she were actually leaving.'

Exercise 5 — Three attempts to close the same €38k deal

1. Voice B (Priya) — names the trade explicitly ('€38k in exchange for 24-month term'), uses silence, sends a recap within an hour with named owners and dates.
2. Voice A (Tomás) — 'sounds like we're aligned, let's circle back next week'. No number, no date, no owner, no email.
3. Voice C (Kwame) — makes the offer then keeps talking, softens, offers €36k before Ana has even responded.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Meridian Print

1. Model: Call the second-place bidder Monday. Ask: (a) can you take over in 30 days, (b) 6-month price, (c) Q3 on-time-delivery numbers, (d) two reference calls. Without this we're negotiating without a BATNA and Cristina will smell it.
2. Model: Interest = her boss's Q4 revenue target. The 22% is a round number and 'paper costs' is theatre. Creative deal: smaller increase (8–10%) IN EXCHANGE FOR a 12-month extension at the new rate (she doesn't have to re-negotiate in six months) or a public reference she can use.
3. Model: 'Cristina, thanks for making time. Two things upfront. First — the 22% as it stands, we can't accept, and I want to be direct rather than dance around it. Second — I hear that your side has pressure, and I don't want to walk away from a working relationship over one letter. So I'd like to spend 30 minutes finding a version that works for both of us — I have three questions and one proposal.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. Model: 'Recap: agreed +8% on remaining 6 months (€24k → €25.9k) IN EXCHANGE FOR a 12-month extension at that rate commencing after current term. You STOPPED SHORT OF confirming the delivery-SLA improvement discussed (target 90% on-time) — flagged as open for Monday. Next: I send updated MSA amendment by Friday 5pm; you sign or comment by Wednesday.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 8 · B8A

When systems fail

Theme: Tech & Security



Learning objectives

- Talk about incidents and outages using the passive naturally — not to hide who did what.
- Run a blameless post-mortem: separate what happened, why, and what we change.
- Use 'have something done' to describe fixes ordered but not done by you.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Your last outage

Think of the last time a system YOU depend on went down — a login, a bank app, a payment terminal, your company's own tool. In 45 seconds out loud: what broke, how did you FIND OUT, and how did the company communicate? Then record a 30-second voice note.

How did you find out — the system, or Twitter/X?

How LONG before someone in the company said anything?

Did they explain WHAT happened, or just say 'sorry'?

Bonus: did anyone get blamed by name in public? Should they have?

Lead-in: incident or drama?

Decide: *BLAMELESS* (describes the system) or *BLAME-LOADED* (names a villain).

1. 'A configuration change was pushed at 14:02 that removed the health-check.'

2. 'Ravi broke the auth service again.'

3. 'The failover was never tested in production — we caught that in the post-mortem.'

4. 'This wouldn't have happened if ops actually cared.'

followUp: In your last incident, was the language you used blameless or blame-loaded?

BLAMELESS

BLAME-LOADED

Reading: The blameless post-mortem

When a system fails, the temptation is always the same — to find the person who pushed the wrong button and make them the story. It is emotionally satisfying and completely useless. The person who pushed the button did so because the system allowed the button to be pushed, because the review that should have caught it was skipped, because the alert that should have fired was silent, and because the runbook that should have said 'stop' didn't exist. Blame stops at the first name; a blameless post-mortem doesn't stop until it reaches the third or fourth WHY.

The grammar of the incident report is the passive, and it is used for a specific reason — not to hide the actor, but to keep the focus on the system. 'A configuration change WAS PUSHED at 14:02 that removed the health-check' is more useful than 'Ravi pushed a bad config'. The passive says: the interesting thing is what happened to the system, not who happened to be at the keyboard. This is why the whole family of passive forms — 'the database HAD BEEN restarted', 'the alert HAS NOT YET

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BEEN acknowledged', 'the failover IS BEING tested', 'the root cause WILL HAVE BEEN identified by Friday' — is the working vocabulary of ops writing. When you do want a name, name a role, not a person: 'the on-call engineer' rather than 'Ravi'.

A useful post-mortem has three sections and never more: What happened (a timeline, in the passive, minute by minute); Why it happened (the chain of contributing causes, at least three deep — never one); and What we're changing (concrete actions with owners and dates — not 'we should be more careful'). The single most valuable phrase in the whole document is 'we HAVE the alert THRESHOLD RECONFIGURED by Wednesday' — using 'have something done' to make clear that the fix is owned but the person doing it is not necessarily the person writing the report. If your post-mortem doesn't produce at least three specific changes with dates, you didn't hold a post-mortem — you held a wake.

1. The point of a BLAMELESS post-mortem is...
 - (A) To protect senior engineers
 - (B) To keep the focus on the system, not the person, so the real chain of causes surfaces
 - (C) To avoid writing anything down
2. 'A configuration change was pushed at 14:02' uses the passive because...
 - (A) English grammar rules force it
 - (B) The interesting thing is what happened to the system, not who happened to be at the keyboard
 - (C) It sounds more formal
3. A useful post-mortem has how many sections?
 - (A) One: What happened
 - (B) Three: What happened, Why, and What we're changing
 - (C) Seven
4. 'We'll have the alert threshold reconfigured by Wednesday' is an example of...
 - (A) A passive voice past tense
 - (B) 'Have something done' — the fix is owned, but not necessarily by the writer
 - (C) A pronunciation drill

Vocabulary in context

Match the incident term to its plain-English meaning.

outage — a period when a service is unavailable

root cause — the underlying reason, not just the last thing that broke

post-mortem — the meeting and document after an incident, to learn from it

runbook — the step-by-step guide for handling a known kind of incident

failover — the automatic switch to a backup system when the primary fails

blast radius — how far the damage spread — which users, which regions, which systems

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Vocabulary: incidents, security and post-mortem language

- outage / downtime** — the service is unavailable
- degradation** — slower or partial — not fully down
- trigger (n./v.)** — the last thing that set the incident off
- root cause** — the underlying reason — usually a chain, not one thing
- contributing factor** — something that made the incident worse or more likely
- blast radius** — the scope of impact — who, where, how much
- breach** — unauthorised infiltration of data or systems
- vulnerability** — a weakness that could be exploited
- exploit (n./v.)** — code or method that abuses a vulnerability
- patch (v./n.)** — fix a vulnerability in software
- credential stuffing** — attackers systematically trialling leaked passwords against your login
- MFA (multi-factor auth)** — second factor to prove it's really you
- timeline** — minute-by-minute record of what happened
- runbook** — the pre-written playbook for handling a known incident
- on-call engineer** — the person paged first when an alert fires
- the five whys** — keep asking 'why' until you reach a process, not a person
- action items** — the changes we'll make, with owners and dates
- blameless (adj.)** — impartial and focused on the system, rather than apportioning individual culpability

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. The whole payments API went down for 47 minutes — a total ____.
2. The ____ was a missing null-check in the auth service, but the ____ was that the code review had been skipped under launch pressure.
3. Attackers used a stolen password list against our login — a classic ____ attack.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. The ____ was small — only Portuguese users on the mobile app were affected.

5. We're rolling out ____ across all admin accounts by end of quarter — no more password-only logins for anything sensitive.

6. The alert fired at 02:14; the ____ - ____ acknowledged in 4 minutes — under our SLA.

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 <u>underlying reason for the failure</u> was a database deadlock that wasn't caught in staging.

2. The <u>person currently handling alerts</u> was paged at 3 AM but didn't respond for ten minutes.

3. We need to <u>trigger the automatic switch to a backup</u> manually to verify it works.

4. The <u>period when the service was unavailable</u> lasted exactly 47 minutes during peak traffic.

5. The report must be <u>impartial and focused on the system</u> to ensure we actually learn from this.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a summary memo for an internal engineering post-mortem following a 45-minute payment gateway outage.

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

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

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

sample: The outage on Tuesday morning was a total failure of the primary gateway for 45 minutes, resulting in a significant blast radius across all Southern European markets. While the root cause was a malformed API call, a major contributing factor was the silence of the automated alerts, which had been accidentally disabled during the previous night's maintenance. In line with our blameless culture, we focused on the system's failure to notify the on-call engineer rather than the individual error. We have

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now logged several action items, including the implementation of a secondary watchdog service and a mandatory review of alert thresholds. We will have the updated runbook published by Friday. Recommendation: we must automate alert verification as part of every deployment pipeline to ensure this silence never recurs.

Practice B — Incident collocations

Match each verb to the noun it most naturally goes with in incident language.

acknowledge — an alert

page — the on-call engineer

roll back — a bad deploy

patch — a vulnerability

trigger — a failover

log — an action item

Practice C — Build a post-mortem line

Use each cluster of words to write ONE sentence you could put in a real post-mortem.

1. trigger · null-check · auth service · 14:02

2. blast radius · Portuguese · mobile · 12 minutes

3. runbook · updated · SRE lead · Wednesday

4. on-call · paged · acknowledged · 4 minutes

Practice D — Odd one out

Which word in each group does NOT belong to the same field?

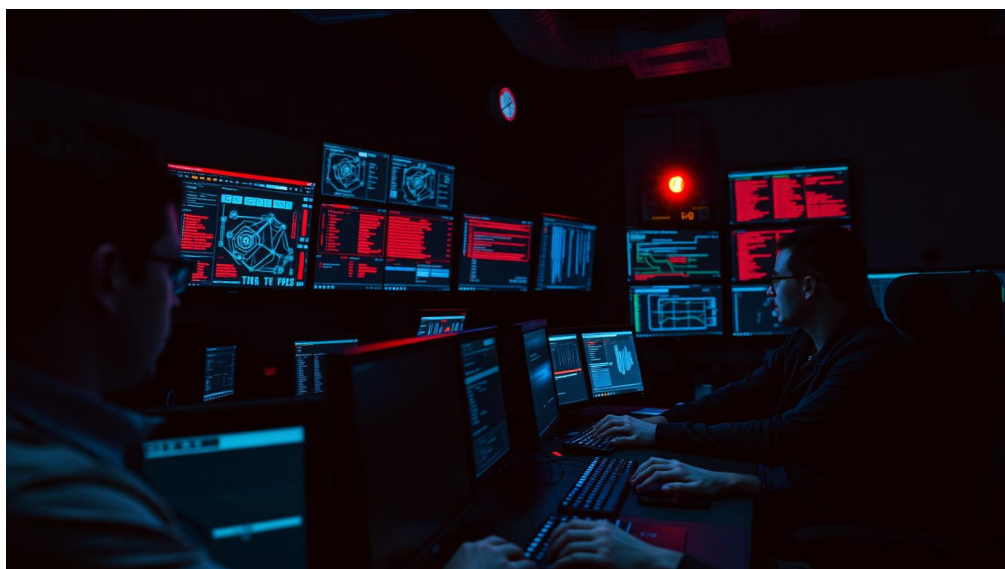
1. outage · downtime · degradation · runbook

2. breach · vulnerability · exploit · timeline

3. acknowledge · trigger · page · roll back

4. MFA · credential stuffing · patch · blameless

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar focus: The passive (all forms) & have something done

1. The passive across tenses — one pattern, all times — Form: BE (in the right tense) + past participle. • Present simple: 'The database IS backed up every hour.' • Present continuous: 'The failover IS BEING tested right now.' • Present perfect: 'The alert HAS BEEN acknowledged.' • Past simple: 'A bad config WAS PUSHED at 14:02.' • Past continuous: 'The service WAS BEING restarted when the second alert fired.' • Past perfect: 'The health-check HAD BEEN removed by an earlier change.' • Future / future perfect: 'The patch WILL BE deployed tonight' / 'The root cause WILL HAVE BEEN identified by Friday.' • Modals: 'The failover SHOULD BE tested weekly.' / 'This COULD HAVE BEEN prevented.'

2. Why use the passive in incident writing? — Not to hide the actor — to keep the focus on the SYSTEM. 'A configuration change WAS PUSHED at 14:02 that removed the health-check.' = the interesting thing is the state of the system. 'Ravi pushed a bad config' = the interesting thing is Ravi. Emotionally satisfying, learning-destroying. When you DO want the actor, name a ROLE, not a person: 'by the on-call engineer', 'by the deploy pipeline', 'by an automated job'.

3. HAVE something DONE — the fix is owned, not necessarily by you — Form: HAVE + object + past participle. 'We'll HAVE the alert threshold RECONFIGURED by Wednesday.' — someone will do it; the point is that we're accountable, not that we personally will type the command. 'We HAD the pipeline REVIEWED by security last quarter.' — arranged, not done by us. 'We NEED TO HAVE the runbook UPDATED before we close this incident.' Difference from 'we'll reconfigure': 'have X done' signals ownership without claiming the keyboard work — right for a lead or a manager writing a report.

4. Common traps — • 'The alert was fire' X → 'was FIRED' (past participle, not base form). • 'It was happened' X → 'HAPPEN' is intransitive; there's no passive. Say 'it happened'. • 'We had reconfigured the alert' ≠ 'we had the alert reconfigured'. First = we did it (past perfect). Second = we arranged for someone else to do it ('have something done'). • Overusing the passive = mushy writing. Rule of thumb: use the passive when the SYSTEM is the story; use the active when a PERSON is the story ('The on-call engineer paged the SRE lead at 02:18').

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise A — Rewrite in the passive

Rewrite each sentence in the passive so the SYSTEM is the subject.

1. 'Someone pushed a bad configuration at 14:02.'

2. 'We are testing the failover in staging right now.'

3. 'An earlier change had removed the health-check.'

4. 'The team will identify the root cause by Friday.'

5. 'We should test the failover every week.'

6. 'We could have prevented this with a proper code review.'

Exercise B — 'Have something done'

Rewrite each sentence using 'have something done' — signalling ownership without claiming the keyboard work.

1. 'We're going to reconfigure the alert threshold by Wednesday.' (...but ops actually does it)

2. 'Security reviewed our pipeline last quarter.'

3. 'We need to update the runbook before closing this incident.'

4. 'Legal will draft the customer notification tonight.'

Exercise C — Rewrite blame as blameless

Rewrite each blame-loaded incident line as a blameless one using the passive and, where useful, a role instead of a name.

1. 'Ravi pushed a bad config and broke prod again.'

2. 'Ops never tested the failover and now we're paying for it.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. 'Whoever wrote this alert should be fired — it doesn't fire when the DB is down.'

Listening: three post-mortems for the same 47-minute outage

You're the Head of Engineering. Yesterday your payments API went down for 47 minutes at Portuguese peak lunchtime — €340k of transactions lost or delayed. Three of your engineering leads are writing up the post-mortem. You're listening to their walkthroughs to decide who owns the incident write-up going forward. You're looking for who can think in SYSTEMS, use the passive without hiding, and produce action items with owners and dates.

pre

Which speaker do you predict will produce the most useful post-mortem — and what makes a post-mortem useful?

Think of an outage YOU were part of. Who got blamed — and what was the actual root cause?

gist

1. Which lead's post-mortem gets adopted, and why?

2. Which lead's post-mortem is 'find the guilty person' dressed as engineering?

3. Which lead is technically correct but produces no action?

detail

1. What is Ines's ROOT CAUSE — and how deep does she go?

2. What THREE action items does Ines commit to — with owners and dates?

3. What does Diego propose as the action item, and why does it fail?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Third listen — post-mortem craft

Focus on *HOW* each lead thinks. Answer from what they *DO* with language and structure.

1. Ines uses the passive constantly ('was pushed', 'had been removed', 'will be reconfigured'). What work is the passive doing for her?

2. Diego's post-mortem has an emotional cost beyond the outage. What is it?

3. Kwame writes correct sentences and produces zero change. Why is 'we should be more careful' the most dangerous line in a post-mortem?

Language from the audio — post-mortem moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it *DOES*.

"A configuration change was pushed at 14:02 that removed the health-check." — passive keeps the SYSTEM as subject — the state of the system is what the reader has to fix

"The second-reviewer requirement had been waived for launch week." — past perfect passive — surfaces a pre-existing process gap, not a moment-of-outage mistake

"We'll have the runbook updated to require two reviewers, SRE lead, by Wednesday." — 'have something done' + named owner + named date = an action item with real weight

"Ravi pushed the config and broke prod again." — personal blame — stops learning at the first name, guarantees the pattern repeats

"More training for Ravi and a written warning." — wrong-layer fix — leaves the system unchanged; the next engineer under pressure will do the same

"We should probably be more careful with deploys." — vague action item — satisfies the ritual, imposes no cost, immunises the org against real change

Voice A (Diego): OK so, look — this is really on Ravi. He pushed the config at 14:02 without waiting for a second reviewer. Ravi's been here two years, he should have known better. Look, everyone was under pressure for the launch, sure, but you don't just push to prod on launch day without a review. So my action items are: written warning for Ravi, and more training for the whole team on deploy discipline. That should sort it.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice B (Ines): OK, timeline. At 14:02 a configuration change was pushed that removed the /healthz endpoint from the load balancer. At 14:06 the on-call engineer was paged. At 14:14 the health-check misconfiguration was identified and the change was rolled back. Service was fully restored at 14:49. Now — why. WHY 1: the change had been approved with only one reviewer. WHY 2: the second-reviewer requirement had been waived for launch week under time pressure — that had been agreed the previous Monday. WHY 3, and this is the important one: the runbook did not classify auth-adjacent changes as requiring two reviewers regardless of launch pressure. That's the real gap. So — three action items. One, we'll have the runbook updated to require two reviewers on any auth-adjacent change regardless of launch phase — SRE lead, by Wednesday. Two, we'll have the /healthz alerting reconfigured so a missing endpoint pages within 60 seconds — on-call rotation lead, by Friday. Three, we'll have a monthly failover drill scheduled into the calendar — Head of Platform, first drill by end of month. No individual names in the write-up; the point is the process.

Voice C (Kwame): So, timeline is basically what Ines said — the config was pushed at 14:02, the alert was acknowledged at 14:06, the fix went in around 14:14. Look, we should be more careful with deploys, honestly. We should probably test the failover more often. And, um, we should probably look at the runbook at some point too. Yeah. That's my report.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second incident walkthrough

Solo task. Pick ONE incident you were part of — an outage, a security scare, a bad deploy, a broken release, a missed cron. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) walking through it. You MUST include: (1) a 3-line TIMELINE in the passive ('X was pushed at...', 'the alert was fired at...', 'the fix was deployed at...'), (2) at least THREE 'whys' deep — trigger, contributing factor, process gap, (3) name ROLES not people ('the on-call engineer', 'the deploy pipeline') — no first names in the incident write-up, (4) ONE 'have something done' action item with a named owner and a named date.

Scene: A real recent outage you were part of (recommended)

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: your Head of Engineering, on the Monday morning after.

Scene: A security scare — phishing, leaked credential, close call

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: your CISO — no drama, structural fix.

Scene: A bad release / broken deploy in a product you own

A: You debrief.

B: Imagined listener: the wider team in a Friday all-hands.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the third why'

Compress the whole post-mortem to ONE sentence — the *PROCESS*-level gap that made the incident possible. Record a **30-second voice note**. Format: 'The trigger was ____, but the real cause was that the ____ had been ____ — so we'll have ____ done by ____.'

Writing mini-task

Write the 4-sentence post-mortem summary (max 80 words). Sentence 1: the timeline in the passive — trigger + detection + fix. Sentence 2: the root cause, going at least three whys deep. Sentence 3: ONE 'have something done' action item with named owner and date. Sentence 4: what you'll change in the RUNBOOK — the process layer, not the person layer.

Wrap-up

One passive line from today you'll use in your next incident write-up.

One 'have something done' action item you'll assign this week.

One name you WON'T put in a post-mortem — and the role you'll use instead.

Quiz

1. The point of a BLAMELESS post-mortem is...
 - (A) To protect senior engineers from consequences
 - (B) To keep the focus on the system so the real chain of causes surfaces
 - (C) To avoid writing a report
2. 'A configuration change was pushed at 14:02' uses the passive because...
 - (A) English requires it
 - (B) The interesting thing is the state of the system, not who was at the keyboard
 - (C) It's more polite than naming Ravi
3. 'We'll have the runbook updated by Wednesday' is an example of...
 - (A) A simple future passive
 - (B) 'Have something done' — signals ownership without claiming the keyboard work
 - (C) A past perfect
4. A useful post-mortem produces...
 - (A) A named villain
 - (B) At least three specific action items with owners and dates
 - (C) A written warning
5. 'We should be more careful with deploys' is a BAD action item because...
 - (A) It's grammatically wrong
 - (B) It has no owner and no date — nothing to check on Friday
 - (C) It uses the passive

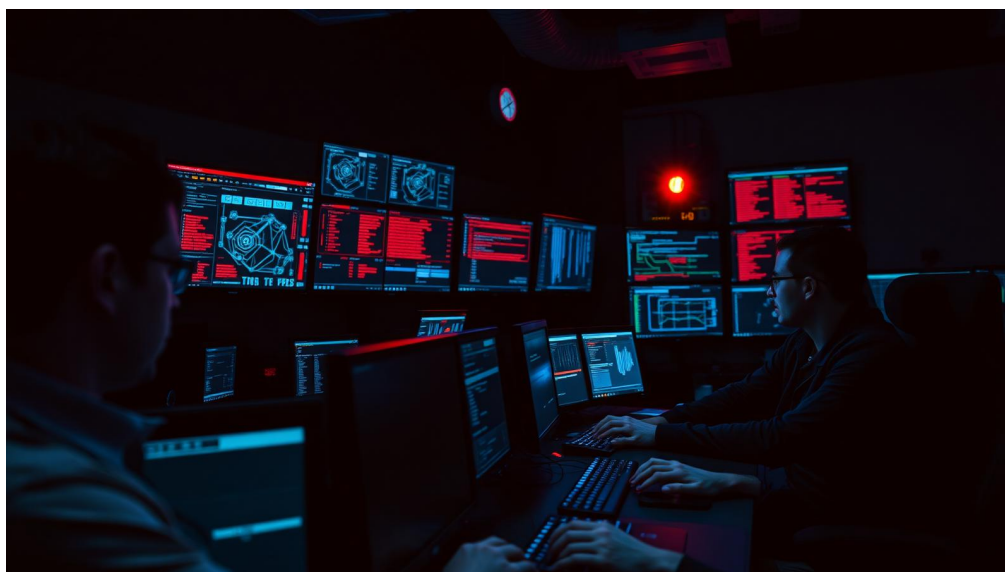
Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Incident vocabulary

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

Word bank: outage · root cause · blast radius · runbook · on-call engineer · MFA

1. The payments API was rendered wholly unavailable for 47 minutes — a total ____.
2. The ____ was a missing null-check in the auth service — but that was only the trigger.
3. The ____ was negligible: only Portuguese mobile users were affected.
4. The alert fired at 02:14 and the ____ - ____ acknowledged it in 4 minutes.
5. We're rolling out ____ across all admin accounts — no more password-only logins for anything sensitive.
6. The ____ was updated on Monday to require two reviewers on any auth-adjacent change.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a formal incident summary (120–180 words) for the CTO regarding a recent system failure. Detail the causes and the remediation plan. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: outage, root cause, blast radius, runbook, on-call engineer, or MFA.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, technical-executive register.

Use the passive voice for blameless reporting.

Structure clearly: Incident Overview, Root Cause Analysis, Corrective Actions.

model: Subject: Incident Report — Payments API Interruption To the CTO, This memorandum outlines our response to the 47-minute outage affecting the payments API on Tuesday. While the immediate trigger was a configuration push, the root cause was a deeper failure in our deployment runbook, which allowed a change to proceed without sufficient secondary review. Fortunately, the blast radius was limited to users in the EMEA region, but the incident highlighted a critical vulnerability in our recovery speed. The on-call engineer responded within four minutes, yet the rollback was delayed by manual verification steps. Moving forward, we will have our automated failover scripts audited and require MFA for all production environment access to prevent unauthorised changes. By hardening these processes, we aim to eliminate this class of failure entirely and ensure high availability for our customers.

Exercise 2 — The passive across tenses

Rewrite each sentence in the passive so the SYSTEM is the subject.

1. 'Someone pushed a bad configuration at 14:02.'

2. 'We are testing the failover in staging right now.'

3. 'An earlier change had removed the health-check.'

4. 'The team will identify the root cause by Friday.'

5. 'We should test the failover every week.'

6. 'We could have prevented this with a proper code review.'

Exercise 3 — Have something done

Rewrite each sentence using 'have something done' to signal ownership without claiming the keyboard work.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'We're going to reconfigure the alert threshold by Wednesday.' (...but ops actually does it)

2. 'Security reviewed our pipeline last quarter.'

3. 'We need to update the runbook before closing this incident.'

4. 'Legal will draft the customer notification tonight.'

Exercise 4 — Blameless or blame-loaded?

Decide whether each incident line is *BLAMELESS* (describes the system) or *BLAME-LOADED* (names a villain).

1. 'A configuration change was pushed at 14:02 that removed the health-check.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED
2. 'Ravi broke the auth service again.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED
3. 'The failover was never tested in production — we caught that in the post-mortem.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED
4. 'This wouldn't have happened if ops actually cared.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED
5. 'The second-reviewer requirement had been waived for launch week.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED
6. 'Whoever wrote this alert should be fired.'
(A) BLAMELESS
(B) BLAME-LOADED

Exercise 5 — Rewrite blame as blameless

Rewrite each blame-loaded line as a blameless incident sentence using the passive and, where useful, a role instead of a name.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'Ravi pushed a bad config and broke prod again.'
2. 'Ops never tested the failover and now we're paying for it.'
3. 'Whoever wrote this alert should be fired — it doesn't fire when the DB is down.'

Exercise 6 — Three post-mortems for the same 47-min outage

You'll hear three engineering leads walk through the same outage. Decide who should own the incident write-up going forward.

1. Which lead's post-mortem is adopted, and why?
2. Which lead's post-mortem is 'find the guilty person' dressed as engineering?
3. Which lead is technically correct and produces zero change?

Voice A (Diego): This is really on Ravi. He pushed the config at 14:02 without waiting for a second reviewer. Everyone was under launch pressure, sure, but you don't push to prod on launch day without a review. Action items: written warning for Ravi, more training for the whole team.

Voice B (Ines): Timeline. At 14:02 a configuration change was pushed that removed the /healthz endpoint. At 14:06 the on-call engineer was paged. At 14:14 the change was rolled back. Service was fully restored at 14:49. Why. WHY 1: the change had been approved with only one reviewer. WHY 2: the second-reviewer requirement had been waived for launch week. WHY 3: the runbook did not classify auth-adjacent changes as always requiring two reviewers. Three action items. One, we'll have the runbook updated — SRE lead, by Wednesday. Two, we'll have the /healthz alerting reconfigured to page within 60 seconds — on-call lead, by Friday. Three, we'll have a monthly failover drill scheduled — Head of Platform, first drill by end of month.

Voice C (Kwame): Timeline is what Ines said. We should be more careful with deploys, honestly. We should probably test the failover more often. And, um, we should look at the runbook at some point too. Yeah.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 7 — Write your 4-sentence post-mortem

Pick a real incident from the last 6 months. Write the 4-sentence summary (max 80 words). Sentence 1: timeline in the passive. Sentence 2: root cause, at least three whys deep. Sentence 3: ONE 'have something done' action item with owner and date. Sentence 4: what changes in the RUNBOOK, not what a person will 'try to do better'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: incident or drama?

1. BLAMELESS — describes the system's state, no name attached.
2. BLAME-LOADED — names a person, no cause, no fix.
3. BLAMELESS — points at the process gap.
4. BLAME-LOADED — attacks a team, teaches nothing.

Reading: The blameless post-mortem

1. (B) To keep the focus on the system, not the person, so the real chain of causes surfaces
2. (B) The interesting thing is what happened to the system, not who happened to be at the keyboard
3. (B) Three: What happened, Why, and What we're changing
4. (B) 'Have something done' — the fix is owned, but not necessarily by the writer

Vocabulary: incidents, security and post-mortem language

1. outage / downtime
 2. root cause / contributing factor
 3. credential stuffing
 4. blast radius
 5. MFA
 6. on-call engineer
1. The root cause was a database deadlock that wasn't caught in staging.
 2. The on-call engineer was paged at 3 AM but didn't respond for ten minutes.
 3. We need to trigger the failover manually to verify it works.
 4. The outage lasted exactly 47 minutes during peak traffic.
 5. The report must be blameless to ensure we actually learn from this.
1. The trigger was a missing null-check in the auth service, pushed at 14:02.
 2. The blast radius was limited to Portuguese mobile users over a 12-minute window.
 3. We'll have the runbook updated by Wednesday, owned by the SRE lead.
 4. The on-call engineer was paged at 14:06 and acknowledged the alert within 4 minutes.
1. runbook — the other three describe the state of the service; a runbook is a document.
 2. timeline — the other three are security terms; a timeline belongs to post-mortem structure.
 3. trigger — the other three are actions the on-call takes; a trigger is what STARTED the incident.
 4. blameless — the other three are technical/security terms; blameless describes the tone of the write-up.

Grammar focus: The passive (all forms) & have something done

1. 'A bad configuration WAS PUSHED at 14:02.' (Or: '...was pushed at 14:02 by the deploy pipeline.')
 2. 'The failover IS BEING TESTED in staging right now.'
 3. 'The health-check HAD BEEN REMOVED by an earlier change.'
 4. 'The root cause WILL HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED by Friday.' (Or: 'will be identified by Friday.')
 5. 'The failover SHOULD BE TESTED every week.'
 6. 'This COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED with a proper code review.'
1. 'We'll HAVE the alert threshold RECONFIGURED by Wednesday.'
 2. 'We HAD our pipeline REVIEWED by security last quarter.'
 3. 'We need to HAVE the runbook UPDATED before we close this incident.'
 4. 'We'll HAVE the customer notification DRAFTED by legal tonight.'
1. Model: 'A bad configuration WAS PUSHED to production at 14:02, removing the health-check. The change HAD BEEN APPROVED without the standard second reviewer under launch-week pressure — a contributing factor we're addressing in the runbook.'
 2. Model: 'The failover HAD NOT BEEN TESTED in production for six months. We'll HAVE weekly failover drills SCHEDULED starting next Monday, owned by the SRE lead.'
 3. Model: 'The alert AS CONFIGURED does not fire on complete DB unavailability — only on high latency. This CONTRIBUTED to the 12-minute detection delay. We'll HAVE the alert threshold RECONFIGURED by Wednesday, owned by the on-call rotation lead.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Listening: three post-mortems for the same 47-minute outage

1. Voice B (Ines). Uses the passive to keep the focus on the system ('a configuration change was pushed', 'the health-check had been removed'), digs three whys deep (skipped review → launch pressure → no second-reviewer requirement in the runbook), names ROLES not people, and produces three action items with owners and dates.
 2. Voice A (Diego). Names Ravi four times ('Ravi pushed the config', 'Ravi should have known'), stops at the first WHY, and proposes 'more training for Ravi' as the action item. The system-level failure — no second-reviewer requirement — is never named. Two months from now the same thing happens with someone else.
 3. Voice C (Kwame). Reads the timeline accurately, uses the passive well ('the alert was acknowledged at 14:06'), but the 'action items' are 'we should be more careful', 'we should test more', 'we should probably look at the runbook'. No owners, no dates, no fix. The document is a wake, not a post-mortem.
1. Immediate trigger: 'a configuration change was pushed at 14:02 that removed the /healthz endpoint from the load balancer'. WHY 1: 'the change had been approved with only one reviewer'. WHY 2: 'the second-reviewer requirement had been waived for launch week under time pressure'. WHY 3: 'the runbook did not classify auth-adjacent changes as requiring two reviewers regardless of launch pressure'. So the action is at the RUNBOOK level, not the reviewer level — that's what makes the post-mortem useful.
 2. 1) 'We'll HAVE the runbook UPDATED to require two reviewers on any auth-adjacent change regardless of launch phase — SRE lead, by Wednesday.' 2) 'We'll HAVE the /healthz alerting RECONFIGURED so a missing endpoint pages within 60 seconds — on-call rotation lead, by Friday.' 3) 'We'll HAVE a monthly failover drill SCHEDULED into the calendar — Head of Platform, first drill by end of month.' All three: named change, named owner, named date.
 3. 'More training for Ravi and a written warning.' It fails because it fixes the wrong layer — the system will still allow single-reviewer pushes of auth-adjacent changes under launch pressure. Two months later a different engineer, under a different launch pressure, does the same thing. The pattern repeats; the training is theatre.
1. It keeps the SYSTEM as the subject of every sentence in the timeline. The reader's attention stays on 'what state was the system in?' — which is where the fix has to happen. If Ines wrote 'Ravi pushed the config', the reader's brain would immediately want to know what to do about Ravi — a dead end. The passive is a form of thinking, not just a form of politeness.
 2. It teaches the engineering team that when things go wrong, individuals get named and punished. Next time an engineer sees something odd right before a deploy, they'll STAY QUIET — because raising it might make them the story. Diego's post-mortem doesn't just fail to fix this outage; it manufactures the conditions for the next one.
 3. Because it satisfies the ritual — the report exists, the meeting was held — without imposing any cost or commitment on anyone. There is nothing to check on Friday. Six months later the outage is 'a known thing that keeps happening', and the team stops taking post-mortems seriously. Vague action items are worse than none — they immunise the organisation against real ones.

Quiz

1. (B) To keep the focus on the system so the real chain of causes surfaces
2. (B) The interesting thing is the state of the system, not who was at the keyboard
3. (B) 'Have something done' — signals ownership without claiming the keyboard work
4. (B) At least three specific action items with owners and dates
5. (B) It has no owner and no date — nothing to check on Friday

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Incident vocabulary

1. outage
2. root cause
3. blast radius
4. on-call engineer
5. MFA
6. runbook

Exercise 2 — The passive across tenses

1. 'A bad configuration WAS PUSHED at 14:02.'
2. 'The failover IS BEING TESTED in staging right now.'
3. 'The health-check HAD BEEN REMOVED by an earlier change.'
4. 'The root cause WILL BE IDENTIFIED by Friday.' (or 'will have been identified')
5. 'The failover SHOULD BE TESTED every week.'
6. 'This COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED with a proper code review.'

Exercise 3 — Have something done

1. 'We'll HAVE the alert threshold RECONFIGURED by Wednesday.'
2. 'We HAD our pipeline REVIEWED by security last quarter.'
3. 'We need to HAVE the runbook UPDATED before we close this incident.'
4. 'We'll HAVE the customer notification DRAFTED by legal tonight.'

Exercise 4 — Blameless or blame-loaded?

1. (A) BLAMELESS
2. (B) BLAME-LOADED
3. (A) BLAMELESS
4. (B) BLAME-LOADED
5. (A) BLAMELESS
6. (B) BLAME-LOADED

Exercise 5 — Rewrite blame as blameless

1. Model: 'A bad configuration WAS PUSHED to production at 14:02, removing the health-check. The change HAD BEEN APPROVED without the standard second reviewer under launch-week pressure.'
2. Model: 'The failover HAD NOT BEEN TESTED in production for six months. We'll HAVE weekly failover drills SCHEDULED starting next Monday, owned by the SRE lead.'
3. Model: 'The alert AS CONFIGURED does not fire on complete DB unavailability. We'll HAVE the alert threshold RECONFIGURED by Wednesday, owned by the on-call rotation lead.'

Exercise 6 — Three post-mortems for the same 47-min outage

1. Voice B (Ines) — passive keeps the SYSTEM as subject, digs three whys deep to a runbook-level gap, names ROLES not people, produces three action items with owners and dates ('we'll have X done by Wednesday, owned by SRE lead').
2. Voice A (Diego) — names Ravi four times, stops at the first WHY, proposes 'more training for Ravi' as the fix. The system-level gap (no second-reviewer requirement) is never named.
3. Voice C (Kwame) — accurate timeline, correct passive, but 'we should be more careful' has no owner, no date, no fix. The document is a wake, not a post-mortem.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 8 · B8B

Going public

Theme: Tech & Security



Learning objectives

- Draft a 3-sentence public statement about an incident that is honest, human and defensible.
- Use reporting verbs (admit, deny, confirm, acknowledge, decline to comment, refute) with the correct grammar.
- Know the difference between what you SAY, what you IMPLY, and what you REFUSE to say — and why the difference matters in crisis comms.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · A statement you remember

Think of a public statement from a company *AFTER* something went wrong — an outage, a breach, a scandal. In 45 seconds out loud: did they land it, or make it worse? Then record a 30-second voice note about the *ONE* line that stuck with you.

Was it out within HOURS, or DAYS?

Did they say what happened — or hide behind 'unauthorised third-party access'?

Did they say sorry, or 'we regret any inconvenience'?

Bonus: did their share price / user trust survive the statement?

Lead-in: lands or leaks?

Decide: *LANDS* (honest, specific, human) or *LEAKS* (hedged, corporate, worse than silence).

1. 'We got this wrong. Your data was exposed for 4 hours. Here is what we're doing.'

2. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users.'

3. 'A configuration error exposed 12,000 email addresses. No passwords or payment data were affected.'

4. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously.'

followUp: Which of the LANDS lines could you steal for your next crisis note?

LANDS

LEAKS

Reading: The three-sentence public statement

Every incident that leaves your building becomes a story. If you don't tell it within hours, someone else will — and they will get it wrong. The default corporate reflex is silence, then hedged language ('we are aware of reports of a potential incident'), then, days later, a legal-sanitised statement that says almost nothing. That timeline is now understood by users as the shape of dishonesty. In 2026, silence and hedge cost more trust than a specific, uncomfortable truth. The best crisis statements are three sentences: what happened, what we know so far, what we're doing about it — sent within hours, updated as facts arrive, and signed by a named human, not 'the team'.

The grammar of the crisis statement is reporting verbs, and each one carries a load. **ACKNOWLEDGE** = we accept the fact ('we acknowledge that customer email addresses were exposed'). **CONFIRM** = we've verified the fact ('we can now confirm that no payment data was affected'). **ADMIT** = we accept a

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fact that is bad for us ('we admit that our internal review missed this vulnerability in April'). DENY = we reject a specific claim ('we deny that any customer credit card data was accessed'). REFUTE = we reject a claim WITH EVIDENCE (this is stronger than deny, and legally different — don't use it unless you have the evidence). DECLINE TO COMMENT = we're saying nothing yet — appropriate for an active investigation, damaging if used to dodge basic facts. Get one of these wrong and the follow-up story writes itself.

The most expensive verb in crisis comms is the one you didn't use. If you didn't SAY it, you didn't IMPLY it — but journalists and users infer aggressively. 'We haven't seen evidence of X' is heard as 'X almost certainly happened, but we're not admitting it yet'. 'We are looking into it' is heard as 'we knew and did nothing'. The professional move is to say what you know, name what you don't know yet, and commit to a specific time when you'll say more ('a full update by 18:00 Lisbon time today'). Silence and vagueness aren't neutral in a crisis — they're a story, and it's always worse than the truth.

1. The best crisis statement is...
 - (A) A one-page press release drafted by legal over three days
 - (B) Three sentences — what happened, what we know, what we're doing — sent within hours and signed by a named human
 - (C) A tweet from an anonymous account
2. 'We can confirm no payment data was affected' uses the reporting verb CONFIRM because...
 - (A) It sounds legal
 - (B) It means we've verified the fact — stronger than 'we believe'
 - (C) It's the same as DENY
3. REFUTE differs from DENY because...
 - (A) They're synonyms
 - (B) REFUTE means to reject a claim WITH EVIDENCE — legally stronger and only correct if you have the evidence
 - (C) REFUTE is informal
4. 'We are aware of reports and looking into it' is dangerous because...
 - (A) It's too specific
 - (B) In 2026 users read it as 'we knew and did nothing' — vagueness is a story too
 - (C) It uses the passive

Vocabulary in context

Match the crisis-comms phrase to its plain-English meaning.

holding statement — the first, short public statement while facts are still being gathered

on the record — quotable, attributable to a named person or the company

off the record — not for publication and not attributable — journalist agreement required

material impact — large enough to matter to investors, users or regulators

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customer notification — the direct email/in-app message to affected users

post-incident update — the follow-up statement once the investigation is more complete

Vocabulary: statements, reporting verbs, and crisis comms

holding statement — the first short statement while facts are being gathered

public statement — the official on-the-record message from the company

customer notification — direct email/in-app to affected users

post-incident update — the fuller follow-up once investigation is further along

attributable quote — a sentence a named individual is willing to have attributed to them

no-comment (v.) — decline to answer a specific question — used sparingly

acknowledge (that) — accept the fact, without necessarily admitting fault

confirm (that) — verify a fact — you've checked

admit (that) — accept a fact that is bad for you

deny (that / -ing) — reject a specific claim

refute (that) — reject a claim WITH evidence — legally stronger than deny

decline to comment (on) — explicitly refuse to answer, on the record

get ahead of the story — pre-empt the narrative before it escapes your control

on / off the record — quotable / not quotable, agreed with the journalist

material impact — large enough to matter to investors, users or regulators

reputational damage — erosion of how the company is perceived

commit to a next update at [time] — name the exact time you'll say more — bounds the silence

single point of contact (SPOC) — one named person handling all press / customer questions

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. We can ____ that no payment data was accessed — the audit finished at 03:00.

2. The CEO ____ that the internal review missed this vulnerability in April — a hard sentence to write, but the right one.

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3. We ____ on the pending regulatory investigation — that's a genuine 'we can't say', not a dodge.

4. Get the ____ out within two hours — we don't need to know everything to say something.

5. Route every press question through one ____ — no comms from anyone else, on any channel.

6. The statement will ____ that we ____ a next update at 18:00 Lisbon time — bounds the silence, buys us four hours.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/expression from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. We need to get the <u>first short public message</u> out within the next thirty minutes.

2. The company will <u>accept the fact</u> that email addresses were exposed.

3. We can <u>reject the claim with evidence</u> that passwords were leaked; our logs show no such access.

4. It is vital that we <u>pre-empt the narrative before it escapes</u> our control.

5. The breach is expected to have a <u>large enough effect to matter to investors</u>.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Draft a crisis communications strategy memo to the Executive Committee regarding a recent data exposure incident.

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: To get ahead of the story, we must issue a holding statement by 10:00 AM today. We should acknowledge the exposure of customer emails while we confirm that no financial data was touched. It is critical that we avoid defensive hedging; instead, we will admit that our internal audit missed the

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



vulnerability in the legacy portal. To minimise reputational damage, we have designated the CISO as the single point of contact for all media inquiries. Any claims that passwords were compromised should be handled carefully—we will deny this out loud but only refute it once the forensic logs are fully verified. We commit to a post-incident update for all affected users by end of day. Recommendation: transparency now is the only way to preserve user trust and mitigate the material impact on our upcoming funding round.

Practice B — Weigh the reporting verb

Match each reporting verb to the weight it carries in a public statement.

acknowledge — accept the fact — no fault claim attached

confirm — verify a fact — you have checked and it holds

admit — accept a fact that is BAD for you

deny — reject a specific claim

refute — reject a claim WITH evidence — legally stronger; don't use without proof

decline to comment — explicitly refuse to answer — appropriate for active investigations only

Practice C — Rewrite hedge as a clean line

Each line is corporate hedge. Rewrite it as a LANDS line using ONE reporting verb + the fact.

1. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users.'

2. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously.'

3. 'We are looking into it and will provide further information in due course.'

4. 'The company refutes any suggestion of wrongdoing.'

Practice D — Odd one out

Which word in each group does NOT belong to the same field?

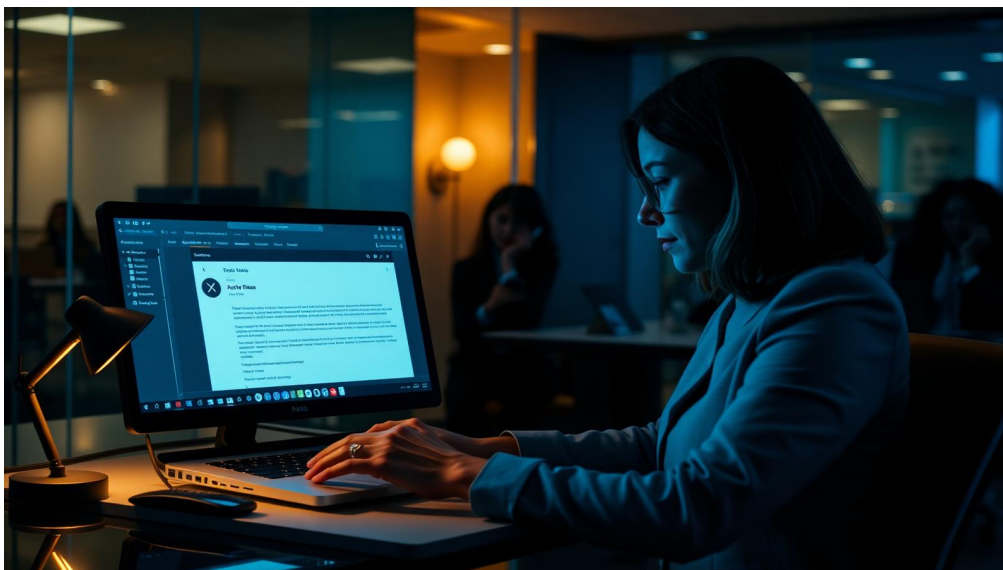
1. holding statement · customer notification · post-incident update · runbook

2. acknowledge · confirm · admit · deploy

3. on the record · off the record · attributable quote · blast radius

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

4. material impact · reputational damage · SPOC · vulnerability



Grammar focus: Reporting verbs

1. ACKNOWLEDGE / CONFIRM / ADMIT — grammar & load — All three take a THAT-clause: 'we acknowledge THAT customer emails were exposed', 'we confirm THAT no payment data was affected', 'we admit THAT our review missed this'. Load: ACKNOWLEDGE = accept the fact, no fault claim. CONFIRM = we've verified the fact. ADMIT = we accept a fact that is BAD for us. ADMIT can also take -ING for actions: 'the company admitted DELAYING notification by 36 hours' — grammatical, but heavier than 'admitted that notification was delayed'.

2. DENY / REFUTE / REJECT — the negative side — DENY + that-clause: 'we deny THAT any credit card data was accessed'. DENY + -ing: 'we deny KNOWING about the vulnerability before Tuesday'. REFUTE = deny WITH evidence — 'we refute the claim that customer data was sold; our access logs show no external export'. Do NOT use 'refute' as a fancy synonym for 'deny' — journalists notice, and if you can't produce the evidence, you look worse than if you'd just said 'deny'. REJECT = stronger than deny for a claim or accusation — 'we reject the characterisation that our team was warned in April'.

3. DECLINE TO COMMENT / DECLINE TO CONFIRM / DECLINE TO ELABORATE — Form: DECLINE + TO + infinitive. 'The company DECLINED TO COMMENT on the pending investigation.' 'The CEO DECLINED TO CONFIRM the exact number of affected users.' Appropriate when: active regulatory investigation, criminal case, personnel matter, or specific number not yet verified. Dangerous when: used to dodge a fact you clearly know. 'No comment' on 'was our data exposed?' reads to users and journalists as 'yes, and we're hoping you'll go away'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. Common traps — • 'We denied the incident' **X** (ambiguous) → 'we denied **THAT** any customer data was accessed' (specific claim). • 'We refute your allegations' — if you have no evidence, this is a lie. Use 'deny' instead. • 'Admits to X' ≠ 'admits X'. 'The company admits **TO** delaying' is spoken English but rarer in written statements — prefer 'admits that...' or 'admits delaying'. • 'We are not aware of any...' — sounds like ignorance is a defence. It isn't. If you're not aware, say when you'll find out ('we will confirm one way or the other by 18:00').

Exercise A — Choose the right reporting verb

Complete each sentence with **ONE** of: *acknowledge / confirm / admit / deny / refute / decline to comment*.

1. We can ____ that no payment data was accessed — the audit finished at 03:00.

2. The CEO ____ that our internal review missed this vulnerability in April.

3. The company ____ ____ ____ on the pending regulatory investigation.

4. We ____ any suggestion that this data was sold — our access logs show no external export.
(STRONG — with evidence)

5. We ____ that customer email addresses were exposed for approximately 4 hours yesterday.

6. The spokesperson ____ that any credit card data had been accessed.

Exercise B — Rewrite the hedge as a statement

Rewrite each *dodgy corporate line* as a *specific, honest reporting-verb sentence*.

1. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users.'

2. 'We are looking into these matters and will provide an update in due course.'

3. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously.'

4. 'We refute all allegations made in the press.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise C — Draft the holding statement (3 sentences)

The facts: at 14:02 yesterday, a configuration error exposed approximately 12,000 customer email addresses for 3 hours 54 minutes. No passwords or payment data were involved. You will notify each affected user by email within 24 hours. Draft the 3-sentence holding statement. It MUST include: (1) ONE 'acknowledge' or 'confirm', (2) explicit boundary of the impact ('no ____ was affected'), (3) a named next commitment with a specific time.

1. Draft the statement.

Listening: three CEO statements about the same breach

You're a customer of Novavault, a Portuguese fintech. Yesterday evening they suffered a data breach exposing customer email addresses. This morning three drafts of the CEO's public statement leaked to a tech reporter — from three different comms teams. You're listening to which one lands. You're not a comms professional; you're a customer trying to decide whether to keep your money with them.

pre

Which speaker do you predict will land it — and what will make you keep your money there?

Think of a company that DID lose your trust after a breach. What was the sentence that lost it?

gist

1. Which CEO's statement earns back trust, and why?

2. Which statement makes the story worse than the actual breach?

3. Which statement is technically fine and still fails?

detail

1. What are the EXACT three claims in Sofia's opening — and what reporting verb sits under each?

2. What SPECIFIC time-bounded commitment does Sofia make, and why does it matter?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. What is the ONE line in Beatriz's over-legal statement that is technically correct but does the most damage?

Third listen — comms craft

Focus on HOW each CEO uses language and structure. Answer from what they DO.

1. Sofia includes a hard admission ('we should have detected this faster'). Isn't that a legal risk?

2. Diogo's statement is 'safe' in the sense that it says nothing. Why is that the least safe move?

3. Beatriz's draft is passive, un-signed, and 'in due course'. What single word would save it?

Language from the audio — crisis-comms moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"We acknowledge that ~12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday." — acknowledge + specific number + specific window = fact, not hedge

"We can confirm that no passwords, payment information or account balances were accessed." — confirm + explicit BOUNDARY of impact = reassurance where it's warranted

"We should have detected this faster." — specific, bounded admission = closes the story down; hedge invites speculation

"Every affected user will receive a direct email by 12:00 tomorrow; full post-incident report within 14 days." — TWO named times = bounds the silence at both ends, proves urgency and thoroughness

"We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users." — hedged silence = invites others to define the story, expands liability

"The affected parties will be contacted in due course." — passive + no time + 'parties' = technically correct, emotionally absent, damaging

Voice A (Diogo — hedging draft): We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some of our users yesterday afternoon. We take the security of our users extremely seriously. Our team is actively looking into these matters, and we will provide a further update in due course. — The Novavault team.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice B (Sofia — the CEO): We acknowledge that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday, as a result of a configuration error which has now been fixed. We can confirm that no passwords, payment information or account balances were accessed. And I want to be direct about one thing: we should have detected this faster — the alert that would have caught it had been misconfigured, and we are addressing that this week. Every affected user will receive a direct email notification by 12:00 tomorrow. A full post-incident report will be published within 14 days, and I will personally answer questions on it live. — Sofia Duarte, CEO.

Voice C (Beatriz — over-legal draft): It has been determined that a data exposure incident occurred on the platform yesterday. Appropriate steps are being taken to investigate the circumstances and remediate any weaknesses identified. The affected parties will be contacted in due course. Any further inquiries should be directed to press@novavault.pt. — Signed, the Communications Office.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second crisis briefing

Solo task. Pick ONE incident YOUR company (or a company you know) faced in the last two years — outage, breach, product recall, staffing scandal. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) delivering the CEO's public statement out loud. You MUST include: (1) ONE 'acknowledge' or 'confirm' + a SPECIFIC number and time window, (2) ONE 'we can confirm that no ___ was affected' — the boundary line, (3) ONE 'admit' — the uncomfortable operational truth, (4) TWO named time commitments — the short (24h) one and the long (14-day) one, (5) sign it with a name — real or made-up.

Scene: A real recent incident at your company / industry (recommended)

A: You deliver the CEO statement.

B: Imagined listener: your customers, reading it on your website within 4 hours of the incident.

Scene: A hypothetical: your product exposed customer emails for 4 hours

A: You deliver the CEO statement.

B: Imagined listener: a tech reporter, who will publish quotes.

Scene: A staffing / safety scandal at a company you follow

A: You deliver the imagined CEO statement.

B: Imagined listener: employees, who will forward it to journalists if it feels false.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'the sentence that closes the story'

Compress the whole statement to ONE sentence — the sentence a journalist would quote if they only had one line. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'We [acknowledge / confirm] that [specific fact + specific window]; we can confirm no [X] was affected; we should have [uncomfortable truth]; next update at [specific time]. — [Name].'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Writing mini-task

Draft the 3-sentence holding statement (max 80 words) for a hypothetical incident at YOUR company. It MUST include: (1) ACKNOWLEDGE or CONFIRM + a specific number and time window, (2) the boundary — 'we can confirm no ____ was affected', (3) ONE named commitment with a specific time. Sign it with a real name and a real role — not 'the team'.

Wrap-up

One reporting verb from today (acknowledge / confirm / admit / deny / refute) you'll use precisely, not casually.

One 'we take X seriously' sentence you'll DELETE from any future statement — and what you'll replace it with.

One time-boxed commitment format ('by 12:00 tomorrow / within 14 days') you'll steal for your next crisis note.

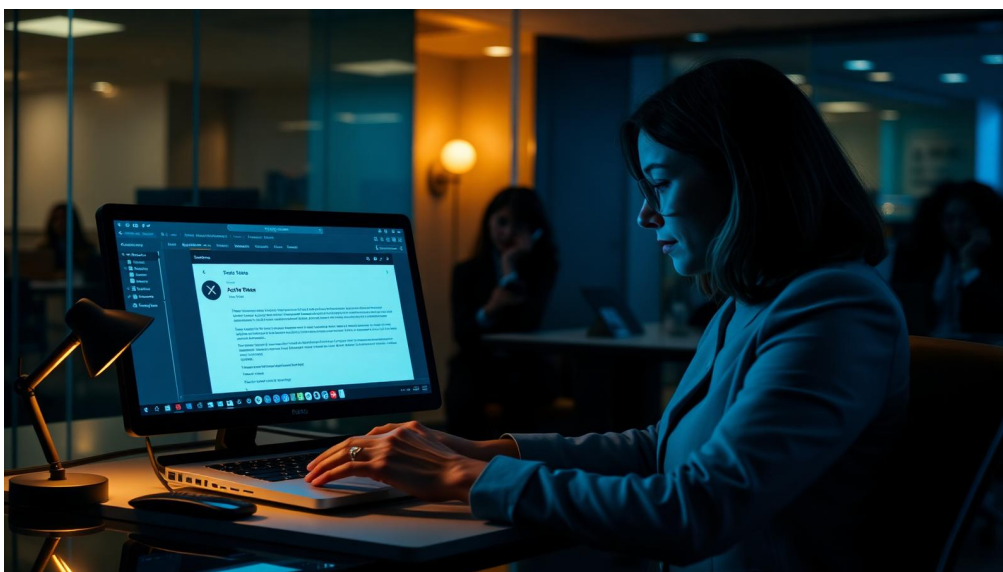
Quiz

1. The best crisis statement is...
 - (A) A one-page release drafted by legal over three days
 - (B) Three sentences within hours, signed by a named human, updated as facts arrive
 - (C) A single tweet
2. REFUTE is stronger than DENY because...
 - (A) It's more polite
 - (B) REFUTE means to reject a claim WITH EVIDENCE — only use it if you have the evidence
 - (C) It's less formal
3. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident' is dangerous because...
 - (A) It's a passive voice error
 - (B) In 2026 users read hedged silence as 'we knew and did nothing'
 - (C) It's too specific
4. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously' should be...
 - (A) Kept — it's reassuring
 - (B) Deleted — every company writes it and it says nothing; replace with what you're DOING
 - (C) Repeated three times
5. The best statement includes TWO time commitments — a short one and a long one — because...
 - (A) Longer sounds more official
 - (B) The short one proves urgency; the long one bounds the silence and proves the investigation isn't rushed
 - (C) Legal requires two

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Crisis-comms vocabulary

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

Word bank: holding statement · single point of contact · material impact · customer notification · post-incident update · off the record

1. Issue the ____ ____ within two hours — we don't need every fact confirmed to say something.

2. Route every press question through one ____ ____ ____ — no comms from anyone else.

3. The breach exposed 47,000 records — that constitutes a ____ ____, and the regulator has to be notified.

4. Every affected user will receive a direct ____ ____ by 12:00 tomorrow.

5. The full ____ - ____ ____ will be published within 14 days.

6. She'd speak to us ____ ____, but not on the record.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a crisis communication strategy (120–180 words) for the Executive Board following a security breach. Outline how to handle public and internal messaging. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: holding statement, single point of contact, material impact, customer notification, post-incident update, or off the record.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, high-stakes crisis register.

Use strong reporting verbs (e.g., 'confirm', 'refute', 'acknowledge').

Structure clearly: Immediate Actions, Communication Channels, Long-term Plan.

model: Subject: Crisis Communication Strategy — Data Exposure To the Executive Board, In light of the recent data exposure, our primary objective is to maintain market trust through transparency. We have already issued an initial holding statement to acknowledge the incident, and Sofia has been designated as the single point of contact for all media inquiries to ensure a unified voice. While the incident had no material impact on financial data, the exposure of customer names requires a rigorous customer notification process, which will be completed by 18:00 today. We must avoid giving any off the record comments to reporters, as these can lead to damaging speculation. Instead, we will focus on providing a comprehensive post-incident update once the full forensic audit is concluded in 14 days. Our reputation depends on our ability to demonstrate competence and accountability during this window.

Exercise 2 — Reporting verbs

Complete each sentence with ONE of: acknowledge / confirm / admit / deny / refute / decline to comment.

1. We can ____ that no payment data was accessed — the audit finished at 03:00.

2. The CEO ____ that our internal review missed this vulnerability in April.

3. The company ____ ____ ____ on the pending regulatory investigation.

4. We ____ any suggestion that the data was sold — our logs show no external export. (STRONG — with evidence)

5. We ____ that ~12,000 customer email addresses were exposed yesterday.

6. The spokesperson ____ that any credit card data had been accessed.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 3 — Lands or leaks?

Decide whether each statement **LANDS** (honest, specific, human) or **LEAKS** (hedged, corporate, worse than silence).

1. 'We got this wrong. Your data was exposed for 4 hours. Here is what we're doing.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS
2. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS
3. 'A configuration error exposed 12,000 email addresses. No passwords or payment data were affected.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS
4. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS
5. 'The affected parties will be contacted in due course.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS
6. 'Every affected user will receive a direct email by 12:00 tomorrow.'
(A) LANDS
(B) LEAKS

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the hedge as a statement

Rewrite each dodgy corporate line as a specific, honest reporting-verb sentence.

1. 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some users.'

2. 'We are looking into these matters and will provide an update in due course.'

3. 'We take the security of our users extremely seriously.'

4. 'We refute all allegations made in the press.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Three CEO statements about the same breach

You'll hear three drafts of the same public statement from Novavault. Decide which one earns back trust, which makes the story worse, and which is technically fine but still fails.

1. Which statement earns back trust?

2. Which statement makes the story worse than the breach?

3. Which statement is technically fine and still fails?

Voice A (Diogo — hedging draft): We are aware of reports of a potential incident affecting some of our users yesterday afternoon. We take the security of our users extremely seriously. Our team is actively looking into these matters, and we will provide a further update in due course. — The Novavault team.

Voice B (Sofia — the CEO): We acknowledge that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday, as a result of a configuration error which has now been fixed. We can confirm that no passwords, payment information or account balances were accessed. I want to be direct: we should have detected this faster — the alert that would have caught it had been misconfigured, and we are addressing that this week. Every affected user will receive a direct email by 12:00 tomorrow. A full post-incident report will be published within 14 days. — Sofia Duarte, CEO.

Voice C (Beatriz — over-legal draft): It has been determined that a data exposure incident occurred on the platform yesterday. Appropriate steps are being taken to investigate the circumstances and remediate any weaknesses identified. The affected parties will be contacted in due course. Any further inquiries should be directed to press@novavault.pt. — Signed, the Communications Office.

Exercise 6 — Draft the 3-sentence holding statement

Facts: at 14:02 yesterday, a configuration error at YOUR company exposed 12,000 customer email addresses for 3h 54min. No passwords or payment data involved. You will notify affected users within 24h. Draft the 3-sentence holding statement (max 80 words). Include: (1) ACKNOWLEDGE or CONFIRM + specific number and window, (2) explicit boundary ('no ___ was affected'), (3) ONE named next commitment with a specific time. Sign it with a real name and role.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Novavault

Think about the Novavault case (47,000 customers, email+name+truncated IBAN exposed for ~4h, reporter deadline at 12:00, false '500k' claim spreading). Answer the questions.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Sequence your first four hours (09:00–13:00). What do you publish and in what order — and why that order?

2. The anonymous X account is claiming '500k records'. Do you engage? What do you post?

3. Legal wants you to soften 'we should have detected this faster' to 'we are reviewing our detection processes'. What do you say?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: lands or leaks?

1. LANDS — owns it, specific window, action next.
2. LEAKS — 'aware of reports' says nothing, 'potential' is denial.
3. LANDS — the number, the boundary, the reassurance.
4. LEAKS — the sentence every company writes when they have nothing to say.

Reading: The three-sentence public statement

1. (B) Three sentences — what happened, what we know, what we're doing — sent within hours and signed by a named human
2. (B) It means we've verified the fact — stronger than 'we believe'
3. (B) REFUTE means to reject a claim WITH EVIDENCE — legally stronger and only correct if you have the evidence
4. (B) In 2026 users read it as 'we knew and did nothing' — vagueness is a story too

Vocabulary: statements, reporting verbs, and crisis comms

1. confirm
 2. admitted
 3. decline to comment
 4. holding statement
 5. single point of contact
 6. commit / to
1. We need to get the holding statement out within the next thirty minutes.
 2. The company will acknowledge that email addresses were exposed.
 3. We can refute the claim that passwords were leaked; our logs show no such access.
 4. It is vital that we get ahead of the story.
 5. The breach is expected to have a material impact.
1. Model: 'We can CONFIRM that a data-exposure incident affected approximately 12,000 users between 09:00 and 13:00 today.'
 2. Model: 'We ACKNOWLEDGE that customer email addresses were exposed. Full customer notifications go out today by 18:00.'
 3. Model: 'We are investigating and COMMIT TO a full public update by 18:00 Lisbon time today, signed by the CISO.'
 4. Model: 'We DENY that any credit card data was accessed; our access logs show no external export in the affected window.' (Only use 'refute' if you can produce the evidence.)
1. runbook — the other three are public/customer-facing artefacts; a runbook is internal.
 2. deploy — the other three are reporting verbs; deploy is an engineering action.
 3. blast radius — the other three are press-handling terms; blast radius belongs to incident scoping.
 4. vulnerability — the other three describe crisis stakes and roles; vulnerability is a security term.

Grammar focus: Reporting verbs

1. confirm
 2. admitted
 3. declined to comment
 4. refute
 5. acknowledge
 6. denied
1. Model: 'We ACKNOWLEDGE that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday. We CONFIRM that no passwords or payment data were affected. A full update will be published by 18:00 today.'
 2. Model: 'We are actively investigating and will publish a specific update by 18:00 Lisbon time today. In the meantime we can CONFIRM that the affected service was restored at 17:56 and that no payment data was involved.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Model: (delete it — say what you're actually DOING.) 'We have engaged an external forensics firm; we will notify every affected user directly by 12:00 tomorrow; we will publish the post-incident review within 14 days.'
4. Model: (only if you have the evidence.) 'We REFUTE the claim that customer data was sold to a third party — our access logs, which we have shared with the regulator, show no external export.' If you can't share the evidence, DOWNGRADE to: 'We DENY that any customer data was sold.'
1. Model: 'We ACKNOWLEDGE that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday due to a configuration error, which has now been fixed. We CONFIRM that no passwords, payment information or personal data beyond email addresses were affected. Every affected user will receive a direct notification by email within the next 24 hours, and a full post-incident report will be published within 14 days — signed, [CEO name].'

Listening: three CEO statements about the same breach

- Voice B (Sofia, real CEO). Names the fact, names the boundary, names the action, names the next update time. Uses ACKNOWLEDGE and CONFIRM correctly, uses ADMIT for the uncomfortable bit ('we should have detected this faster'), signs it with her own name. Sounds like a human.
 - Voice A (Diogo, hedging draft). 'We are aware of reports of a potential incident.' 'We are looking into it.' 'We take security extremely seriously.' Every sentence a hedge, no numbers, no time commitment, signed 'the Novavault team'. Users read it as 'we knew, we're stalling, we hope you go away'.
 - Voice C (Beatriz, over-legal draft). Facts are correct, verbs are correct — but the whole statement is passive, un-signed, and reads as if written for regulators, not humans. 'It has been determined that...' 'Steps are being taken...' 'The affected parties will be contacted in due course.' Technically correct, emotionally absent — customers can smell it.
1. ACKNOWLEDGE — 'we acknowledge that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday.' 2. CONFIRM — 'we can confirm that no passwords, payment information or account balances were accessed.' 3. ADMIT — 'we should have detected this faster — the alert that would have caught it had been misconfigured, and we're addressing that this week.' Fact, boundary, hard truth — in that order, in her own voice.
 - 'We will publish a full post-incident report within 14 days, and every affected user will receive a direct email by 12:00 tomorrow.' Two named times: 12:00 tomorrow (short — proves urgency, forces her own team to move), and 14 days (long — proves the full investigation isn't rushed). Bounds the silence at both ends. Diogo makes no time commitment; Beatriz says 'in due course' — which reads as 'never'.
 - 'The affected parties will be contacted in due course.' PASSIVE (who?), no time, and 'affected parties' turns customers into 'parties' — a legal category, not a human. Customers reading their own breach notice want their status ('you were affected'), the specific data ('your email address'), and a specific action ('by tomorrow noon'). Beatriz gives none of the three.
- The received wisdom says yes; the evidence says no. A specific, bounded admission ('we should have detected this faster; the alert had been misconfigured; we're addressing it this week') closes the story down. A hedge invites weeks of speculation — during which every leaked detail expands liability. The bigger legal risk in 2026 is a statement that is later shown to have known-false hedges in it, not one that admits an operational failure and commits to fixing it.
 - Because the story fills the vacuum. Reporters, regulators, users, and competitors all fill Diogo's silence with their own worst-case theory — and by day three, Novavault is defending accusations that are worse than the actual breach. 'We are aware of reports' is not neutral; it's an active invitation for others to define the story. Silence is a statement, and it always says the wrong thing.
 - A name. Signing it 'Sofia Duarte, CEO' converts an anonymous corporate emission into a human accountability. It also changes the writer's own behaviour — you write differently when your name is on it. 'Signed by the Novavault team' is the modern equivalent of 'no one is responsible'. In a crisis, one named human is worth ten pages of legal-safe passive.

Quiz

- (B) Three sentences within hours, signed by a named human, updated as facts arrive
- (B) REFUTE means to reject a claim WITH EVIDENCE — only use it if you have the evidence
- (B) In 2026 users read hedged silence as 'we knew and did nothing'
- (B) Deleted — every company writes it and it says nothing; replace with what you're DOING
- (B) The short one proves urgency; the long one bounds the silence and proves the investigation isn't rushed

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Crisis-comms vocabulary

1. holding statement
2. single point of contact
3. material impact
4. customer notification
5. post-incident update
6. off the record

Exercise 2 — Reporting verbs

1. confirm
2. admitted
3. declined to comment
4. refute
5. acknowledge
6. denied

Exercise 3 — Lands or leaks?

1. (A) LANDS
2. (B) LEAKS
3. (A) LANDS
4. (B) LEAKS
5. (B) LEAKS
6. (A) LANDS

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the hedge as a statement

1. Model: 'We **ACKNOWLEDGE** that approximately 12,000 customer email addresses were exposed between 14:02 and 17:56 CET yesterday. We **CONFIRM** that no passwords or payment data were affected. A full update will be published by 18:00 today.'
2. Model: 'We are investigating and will publish a specific update by 18:00 Lisbon time today. In the meantime we can **CONFIRM** the affected service was restored at 17:56 and no payment data was involved.'
3. Model: (delete it — say what you're **DOING**.) 'We have engaged an external forensics firm; we will notify every affected user directly by 12:00 tomorrow; we will publish the post-incident review within 14 days.'
4. Model: (only if you have the evidence.) 'We **REFUTE** the claim that customer data was sold — our access logs, shared with the regulator, show no external export.' Without evidence, downgrade to **DENY**.

Exercise 5 — Three CEO statements about the same breach

1. Voice B (Sofia, real CEO) — acknowledges + specific number + specific window; confirms the boundary; admits the operational truth; two named time commitments (12:00 tomorrow + 14 days); signed with her name.
2. Voice A (Diogo — hedging) — 'we are aware of reports of a potential incident', 'we take security extremely seriously', signed 'the Novavault team'. Every sentence a hedge, no numbers, no time commitment.
3. Voice C (Beatriz — over-legal) — passive, un-signed, 'in due course'. Facts are right, verbs are right, but reads as if written for regulators, not humans.

Exercise 7 — Case study reflection: Novavault

1. Model: 09:30 alignment call (CEO/CISO/legal/comms). 10:00 draft in CEO inbox. 10:30 Sofia records 60-sec video. 11:00 publish written statement + video on site. 11:15 email affected customers directly. 11:30 reply to Observador reporter with the full statement. Result: at 12:00 the story lands with OUR numbers and OUR voice, not the reporter's.
2. Model: Do **NOT** engage the account directly (feeds algorithm, legitimises a 900-follower voice). DO publish a calm correction on our own channel: '~47,000 customers were affected. Some social reports suggest higher numbers; these are inaccurate. If you have not received an email by 18:00 CET, your account was not affected.' The correction carries a piece of useful information, not just a fight.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Model: The specific admission closes the story down within 48h. The hedge invites weeks of speculation — during which every leaked internal detail expands liability. Regulators and users in 2026 read the hedge as evasion; they read the admission as competence. Land the point; if legal insists, negotiate to 'we should have detected this faster; the alert responsible had been misconfigured, and that has been corrected'.

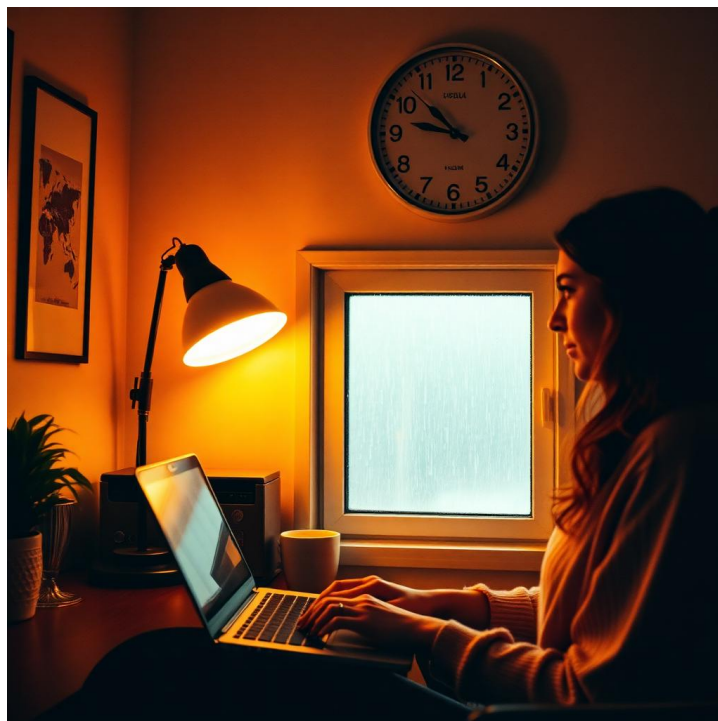
Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

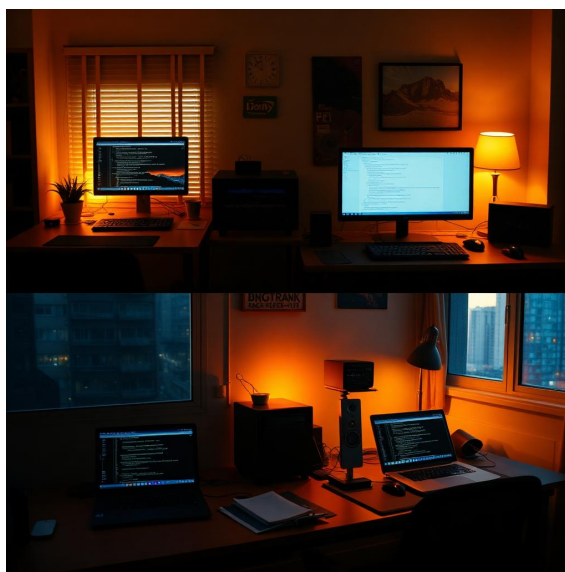
Which term in each group does NOT belong to the same family?

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.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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, ASYNC 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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

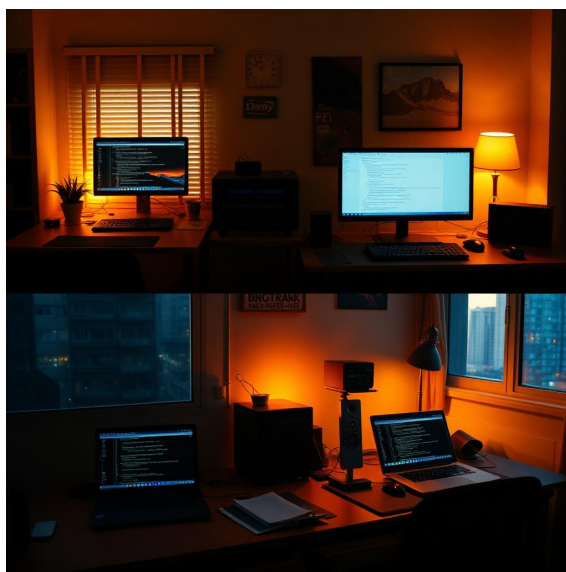


2. The correct pattern is...
 - (A) 'Despite of the eight-hour gap...'
 - (B) 'Despite the eight-hour gap...' — no 'of'
 - (C) 'Despite the gap is eight hours...'
3. The correct purpose clause is...
 - (A) 'We log decisions for to trace them.'
 - (B) 'We log decisions so that future hires can trace them.'
 - (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.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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).

- '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
- 'Daily 09:00 standup for everyone — even the two engineers who are asleep at 09:00 GMT.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
- '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
- 'If something isn't in a meeting, it doesn't happen. Docs are for after the fact.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
- 'Weekly "async town hall" — a 5-minute Loom + a written thread; comments allowed over 48h.'
(A) ASYNC-FIRST
(B) MEETING-HEAVY
- '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



Unit 9 · B9B

Working across cultures

Theme: Remote & Global



Learning objectives

- Adapt your communication style across high-context and low-context cultures without stereotyping.
- Use UNCOUNTABLE and PLURAL-ONLY nouns correctly (feedback, information, staff, headquarters, people) — no 'a feedback', no 'an advice'.
- Build business jargon with common PREFIXES (over-, under-, mis-, re-, dis-, cross-) and SUFFIXES (-able, -ise, -ity, -ness).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The cross-cultural moment you cringe about

Think of a specific cross-cultural work moment (real or observed) that still makes you cringe — a meeting where 'yes' didn't mean yes, an email that landed wrong, feedback taken as an insult. In 45 seconds out loud: what happened, what YOU thought was going on, and what was ACTUALLY going on. Then record a 30-second voice note.

Who was in the room / on the call, and where were they from?

What did YOU expect the response to be?

What actually happened — silence, over-agreement, offence, confusion?

Bonus: what did you learn to say / not say NEXT time?

Lead-in: cross-cultural problem or plus?

Read each cross-cultural situation (1–6). Decide: PROBLEM (a real friction that costs the team) or PLUS (a strength worth protecting).

1. 1. In the Amsterdam office, feedback is given directly in the meeting: 'This slide is confusing — cut it.' The Tokyo team hears this as an attack.

2. 2. The Bangalore team writes long, careful emails with clear context before the ask. The New York team reads to the end and finds them 'clear and easy to action'.

3. 3. In a meeting with the Seoul team, 'yes, we can consider that' means 'no'. The Boston team hears 'yes'.

4. 4. The Lagos office uses a wider register — humour, warmth, personal small talk before business — and the São Paulo team loves working with them.

5. 5. HR pushes a global template where everyone must give '3 improvement points' in performance reviews. Half the office is horrified; the other half thinks it's finally normal.

6. 6. A cross-cultural team knowingly builds a shared 'operating agreement' — how we ask, how we say no, how we disagree — signed by all sides.

followUp: Which of these are happening on YOUR team right now — and which side of the +/- line are they on?

PROBLEM (style mismatch)

PLUS (context helps)

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PROBLEM (indirect misread)

PLUS (trust-building)

PROBLEM (imposed norm)

PLUS (explicit agreement)

Reading: High context, low context, and the middle mile

The most useful frame for working across cultures is not 'us and them' but HIGH-CONTEXT and LOW-CONTEXT. Low-context cultures — much of the Netherlands, Germany, the US Northeast, Australia — expect meaning to sit ON the words. 'Please cut this slide' means please cut this slide. High-context cultures — much of Japan, Korea, India, Brazil, the Arab world — expect meaning to sit AROUND the words. A phrase like 'yes, we can consider that' may, depending on tone and rank, mean 'yes', 'maybe', or a very firm 'no'. Neither side is being difficult; they are running different software.

The trouble starts when one style is treated as the default and the other as the deviation. A New York manager convinced that 'clear feedback is a gift' can quietly humiliate a team in Tokyo. A Delhi lead convinced that 'you never criticise a colleague in front of others' can leave a Berlin engineer completely unaware that their work has serious problems. Both managers are being professional, kind and effective — by the standards of their own culture. The clash isn't personal. It's structural.

Working across cultures at B2 level requires precise nouns. FEEDBACK is uncountable — 'a feedback' is wrong; 'a piece of feedback' or 'some feedback' is right. INFORMATION, RESEARCH, ADVICE, PROGRESS, TRAINING, HOMEWORK, EQUIPMENT — all uncountable in English, whatever they do in your language. STAFF, POLICE, PEOPLE, HEADQUARTERS — plural-only in English, so 'the staff is happy' is wrong; 'the staff ARE happy' or 'the team IS happy' is right. Get these nouns wrong and you sound less senior than you are; get them right and half your English suddenly reads like a native speaker's.

The best cross-cultural teams do not choose one style over another. They make the invisible EXPLICIT. They write a short 'operating agreement' — 'we give improvement feedback in 1:1s, not in group meetings'; 'a written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness'; 'silence in a thread is not disapproval'. It looks bureaucratic. In practice, it does the job that shared cultural context does for a single-culture team — and it does it without asking anyone to abandon their own norms. Whereas a monoculture runs on implicit rules, a cross-cultural team runs on explicit ones. That's not a compromise; it's a competitive advantage.

1. The most useful frame for working across cultures is...

- (A) Us vs them
- (B) HIGH-CONTEXT (meaning around the words) vs LOW-CONTEXT (meaning on the words)
- (C) East vs West

2. The trouble starts when...

- (A) People from different cultures meet at all
- (B) One style is treated as the default and the other as the deviation
- (C) Meetings run too long

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3. 'A feedback' is wrong in English because FEEDBACK is...
- (A) Plural
 - (B) Uncountable — say 'a piece of feedback' or 'some feedback'
 - (C) Formal only
4. 'The staff is happy' is wrong because STAFF is...
- (A) Uncountable
 - (B) Plural-only — 'the staff ARE happy' or use 'the team IS happy'
 - (C) Formal
5. The best cross-cultural teams...
- (A) Choose one style and impose it globally
 - (B) Make the invisible EXPLICIT — a written operating agreement about how feedback, yes/no and silence work
 - (C) Avoid difficult conversations

Vocabulary in context

Match each cross-cultural term to its plain-English meaning.

high-context — meaning sits AROUND the words — tone, rank, silence matter

low-context — meaning sits ON the words — say what you mean

operating agreement — a short written doc making invisible team norms explicit

cross-cultural — involving people from more than one cultural background

monoculture — a team where everyone shares the same cultural defaults

cultural default — the way YOUR culture assumes things 'should' be done

Vocabulary: culture, prefixes and suffixes in business jargon

high-/low-context — how much meaning sits around vs on the words

direct / indirect (feedback) — explicit criticism vs feedback wrapped in context

hierarchical / flat (org) — a stratified chain of command vs an egalitarian, everyone-can-speak-up structure

operating agreement — written team norms making the invisible explicit

cultural default — the tacit assumption YOUR culture makes about how things ought to be done

code-switching — shifting register fluidly between cultural contexts

over- (overpromise, overwork, over-engineer) — too much

under- (understaffed, underperform, underquote) — not enough

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mis- (miscommunicate, misalign, misread) — wrongly

re- (rework, resend, reprioritise) — again / anew

dis- (disagree, dismiss, disengage) — opposite of / removal

cross- (cross-cultural, cross-functional, cross-border) — across / between

-ability (scalability, accountability, deliverability) — the quality of being ____

-ise / -ize (prioritise, standardise, contextualise) — make ____ / turn into ____

-ness (openness, fairness, tightness) — the state of being ____

-ity (visibility, complexity, granularity) — the state / degree of ____

-less (blameless, dateless, ownerless) — without ____

-friendly (mobile-friendly, timezone-friendly) — designed to work well for ____

practice

Complete each sentence with *ONE* word / phrase.

1. In a ____-____ culture, 'yes, we can consider that' may mean 'no' — depending on rank and tone.

2. We've been ____-staffed on the launch since March — that's why deadlines keep slipping.

3. Every quarter we ____-prioritise the roadmap based on what the market actually did.

4. The ____-cultural team runs on an explicit operating agreement, not on shared assumptions.

5. We need more ____ into the pipeline — leadership can't see what's blocked.

6. Let's ____ the review template so all three offices use the same format.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with *ONE* word/phrase from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. In a <u>culture where meaning sits around the words</u>, silence can often mean a polite 'no'.

2. We need a <u>written document making our team norms explicit</u> to avoid future clashes.

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3. Working on a <u>team with multiple cultural backgrounds</u> requires a high degree of empathy.
4. We must <u>make the review template the same</u> across all our global offices.
5. The whole project failed due to a <u>failure to communicate correctly</u> between the two sites.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write an email to your global team proposing the creation of a 'Team Operating Agreement' to improve cross-cultural collaboration.

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: Following our recent project debrief, it is clear that we have a significant style mismatch between our high-context and low-context team members. This has occasionally led to miscommunication, particularly regarding how we give and receive direct feedback. To address this, I propose we draft a formal operating agreement to make our invisible cultural defaults explicit. We need to standardise our expectations for 'yes' and 'no', as well as how we handle silence in Slack threads. This is not about choosing one culture over another, but about building a cross-cultural framework that increases our collective visibility. Despite our different backgrounds, we share a commitment to transparency and excellence. Recommendation: let's dedicate our next monthly retro to brainstorming these norms, with the goal of having a signed agreement by the end of the quarter to guide our future collaboration.

Practice B — Cross-cultural collocations

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

- give** — constructive feedback in the 1:1
- escalate** — the issue to the regional head
- adapt** — your communication style
- misread** — a polite refusal as agreement
- standardise** — the review template across offices
- align** — on the operating agreement

Practice C — Fix the countability error

Rewrite each sentence, correcting the uncountable / plural-only noun error.

1. 'She gave me a very useful feedback.'

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2. 'I need an advice about the Berlin restructure.'

3. 'The staff is very happy with the new policy.'

4. 'The police is investigating the breach.'

5. 'We did a lot of researches on the Asian market.'

6. 'The headquarter is in Singapore.'

Practice D — Odd one out

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

1. high-context · direct feedback · code-switching · runbook

2. misalign · overpromise · undercut · scalable

3. visibility · complexity · openness · reprioritise

4. operating agreement · cultural default · monoculture · MFA



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Grammar focus: uncountable and plural-only nouns + word building

1. Uncountable nouns — no 'a', no plural, singular verb — In English, many abstract or 'stuff' nouns are uncountable — even when they're countable in other languages. FEEDBACK, INFORMATION, ADVICE, RESEARCH, TRAINING, PROGRESS, WORK, EQUIPMENT, SOFTWARE, LUGGAGE, NEWS, ACCOMMODATION, HOMEWORK, TRAFFIC. • 'She gave me SOME feedback / A PIECE of feedback / TWO PIECES of feedback.' • ✗ 'She gave me a feedback / two feedbacks.' • 'The information IS useful.' (singular verb) • 'The news IS good.' (news = uncountable, singular verb)

2. Plural-only nouns — no singular form, plural verb — STAFF, POLICE, PEOPLE, CATTLE — always plural verb: 'The staff ARE happy.' 'The police ARE investigating.' TIP: if this is awkward for you, swap in a singular collective: 'The TEAM is happy.' 'The DEPARTMENT is investigating.' CLOTHES, JEANS, TROUSERS, GLASSES, SCISSORS — always plural: 'My glasses ARE on the desk.' HEADQUARTERS, MEANS, SPECIES, SERIES — end in -s but can take singular OR plural verb depending on sense; NEVER 'headquarter'.

3. Nouns that change meaning between countable and uncountable — WORK (uncountable, activity) vs a WORK (countable, work of art). EXPERIENCE (uncountable, know-how) vs an EXPERIENCE (countable, one event). • 'I have five years of experience.' (uncountable) • 'That was an incredible experience.' (countable) • 'Business is good.' (uncountable, commerce) vs 'She runs three businesses.' (countable, companies)

4. Building business words — PREFIXES — OVER- = too much: overpromise, overwork, over-engineer. UNDER- = not enough: understaffed, underperform, underquote. MIS- = wrongly: miscommunicate, misalign, misread. RE- = again / anew: rework, resend, reprioritise. DIS- = opposite / removal: disagree, disengage, disincentivise. CROSS- = across / between: cross-cultural, cross-functional, cross-border.

5. Building business words — SUFFIXES — -ITY / -ABILITY = the quality of ____: visibility, scalability, accountability. -NESS = the state of ____: openness, fairness, tightness. -ISE / -IZE = make / turn into: prioritise, standardise, contextualise. -ABLE = can be ____: scalable, deliverable, actionable. -LESS = without: blameless, dateless, ownerless. -FRIENDLY = designed to work well for: mobile-friendly, timezone-friendly. Rule of thumb: adding a suffix often shifts word class — verb → noun, adjective → noun, noun → adjective. Get the word class right before you build.

Exercise A — Fix the countability error

Rewrite each sentence, correcting the uncountable / plural-only noun mistake.

1. 'The manager gave me two very useful feedbacks after the presentation.'

2. 'I need an advice on which vendor to choose.'

3. 'The staff is unhappy with the new hybrid policy.'

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4. 'We did many researches before launching in Vietnam.'

5. 'The news about the merger were leaked yesterday.'

6. 'Our headquarter is moving to Amsterdam next quarter.'

Exercise B — Build the word

Complete each sentence using a PREFIX or SUFFIX from the box: over-, under-, mis-, re-, cross-, -ability, -ise, -ness, -ity.

1. The team keeps ___promising deadlines they can't meet — three quarters in a row now.

2. We're ___staffed on the launch — Priya's asked for two more engineers.

3. The whole conflict was a ___communication — one side said 'let's consider it', the other heard 'yes'.

4. Every quarter we ___prioritise the roadmap based on what the market actually did.

5. The steering committee is ___-functional — product, engineering, legal and comms all sit on it.

6. The board wants more visibility into pipeline ___ — can we forecast a €5M quarter with these two reps?

7. We need to ___ the performance-review template across all four offices.

8. The openn___ of the Amsterdam team is one of our strengths — protect it.

Exercise C — Rewrite the cross-cultural line

Rewrite each vague sentence using ONE uncountable or plural-only noun correctly PLUS ONE prefix/suffix word.

1. 'The Tokyo team was not happy about the criticism in the meeting.'

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2. 'We should tell people in a better way that we need to change our plan.'

3. 'The company has offices in many countries and it's hard to see what everyone is doing.'

4. 'Nobody in the meeting really said no, but they didn't do it.'

Listening: three managers debrief a cross-cultural launch

You're the Chief People Officer. Six months ago, three regional managers led the same product launch across their offices — Amsterdam, Tokyo, São Paulo. You've asked each of them for a 90-second debrief on what worked and what didn't. You're listening for: (1) who names their own CULTURAL DEFAULT, (2) who blames another culture, (3) who has actually installed a shared OPERATING AGREEMENT, and (4) who uses uncountable and plural-only nouns correctly (a proxy for their English maturity).

pre

Which manager do you predict will impress you most, and why?

Which cultural DEFAULT is strongest in your own working style — direct or indirect, hierarchical or flat, relationship-first or task-first?

gist

1. Which manager's debrief impresses you most, and why?

2. Which manager's debrief is 'blame the other culture'?

3. Which manager is well-intentioned but leaves no structure behind?

detail

1. What is Sofia's OPERATING AGREEMENT, in her exact words?

2. What is Bram's LANGUAGE error that reveals more than his content does?

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3. What ONE piece of practical wisdom does Haruki articulate that Bram completely misses?

Third listen — self-awareness vs cultural blindness

Focus on HOW each manager talks about their OWN culture.

1. Bram never says the word 'Dutch' or 'Amsterdam' when describing his team's style. What does that omission mean?

2. Sofia says 'we tend to build relationship first, then negotiate — and I know this looks slow to Bram's team'. What move is she making with that language?

3. Haruki has the sharpest cultural insight of the three — but the weakest structural outcome. What's the lesson?

Language from the audio — cross-cultural moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"We tend to build relationship first, then negotiate — and I know this looks slow to Bram's team." — names her OWN cultural default AND how it lands with another culture, in one sentence

"A written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness." — converts an invisible norm into an explicit operating rule — the whole team can now navigate consent

"The Tokyo team just wouldn't tell us what they wanted." — blames another culture for not being like his own — his default is invisible to him

"We gave them a lot of feedbacks and the staff was surprised." — L1-thinking English — 'feedbacks' (uncountable) + 'staff was' (plural-only) — signals cultural AND linguistic monolingualism

"There is often silence that Bram-san reads as disagreement, when it is actually thinking." — brilliant cross-cultural observation — but stays as insight, never gets written into an agreement

"Silence in a thread is not disapproval; give people 24 hours before you read it as anything." — explicit written norm that makes cross-time-zone async trust possible

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Voice A (Bram, Amsterdam): Honestly, the launch worked in Amsterdam. We did what we always do — clear plan, clear feedback, everyone speaks up in the meeting. The Tokyo team just wouldn't tell us what they wanted. We gave them a lot of feedbacks and the staff was surprised, but that's how you improve. The Brazilians were always late — three weeks late on their piece, no explanations. Look, we were the only office giving proper feedback. Culture is one thing, but a deadline is a deadline.

Voice B (Sofia, São Paulo): So — the launch was hard, and I learned a lot. In São Paulo we tend to build relationship first, then negotiate — and I know this looks slow to Bram's team. What actually saved the launch was an operating agreement the three offices signed in month three. One: a written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness — so any critical decision has to end up in the doc. Two: improvement feedback happens in 1:1s, never in group meetings. Three: silence in a thread is not disapproval; give people 24 hours across the time zones before you read it as anything. All three offices signed off on this. The last three months were much cleaner. We're using the same agreement for the Q3 launch.

Voice C (Haruki, Tokyo): Yes, the launch was interesting. I think there was a lot of misunderstanding at first — but that is normal in cross-cultural work. There is often silence that Bram-san reads as disagreement, when it is actually thinking. In Tokyo, we do not interrupt to prove we are engaged; we wait, and then we speak carefully. This is not disagreement. It is respect. I hope next time we can talk about this more. It was a good experience for the team.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second cultural self-portrait

Solo task. In 90 seconds, describe YOUR OWN cultural default at work — as if you were joining a cross-cultural team on Monday. Record a voice note (up to 90 seconds). You MUST include: (1) ONE thing you consider 'normal / professional' that is actually a cultural default of your own culture, (2) ONE uncountable noun used correctly (feedback / information / advice / research / progress), (3) ONE plural-only noun used correctly (staff / people / police / headquarters), (4) ONE prefix or suffix word (miscommunicate / cross-functional / scalability / prioritise), (5) ONE 'operating agreement' rule you'd propose for the team.

Scene: Joining a genuinely cross-cultural team on Monday (recommended)

A: You self-portrait.

B: Imagined listener: a new manager who has never worked with your culture before.

Scene: Onboarding a colleague from a very DIFFERENT cultural default

A: You self-portrait.

B: Imagined listener: the new colleague, over coffee on day one.

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Scene: Explaining your team's cross-cultural agreement to your CEO

A: You self-portrait.

B: Imagined listener: a CEO who thinks 'this is all soft stuff'.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'one norm we'll write down'

Pick ONE unwritten norm in your team that damages cross-cultural work — and propose the ONE sentence you'd put in the operating agreement to fix it. Record a 30-second voice note. Format: 'Right now, we assume _____. Some colleagues read that as _____. From now on, we agree: _____.'

Writing mini-task

Write a 4-line CROSS-CULTURAL OPERATING AGREEMENT for a team spanning at least three cultures (max 100 words). Each line must be a specific, testable norm — no 'we respect each other'. Cover: (1) how YES / NO is captured, (2) how FEEDBACK is delivered, (3) how SILENCE / delay is interpreted, (4) how DISAGREEMENT is surfaced. Use at least ONE uncountable noun and ONE prefix / suffix word correctly.

Wrap-up

One uncountable noun (feedback / information / advice / news / progress) you'll stop pluralising this week.

One line you'll propose adding to your team's OPERATING AGREEMENT — the invisible norm you'll make explicit.

One prefix / suffix word (miscommunicate / cross-functional / scalability) you'll use in your next status update.

Quiz

1. In a HIGH-CONTEXT culture, meaning sits...
 - (A) ON the words — say what you mean
 - (B) AROUND the words — tone, rank and silence carry meaning
 - (C) In writing only
2. The correct English is...
 - (A) 'She gave me two very useful feedbacks.'
 - (B) 'She gave me two very useful pieces of feedback.'
 - (C) 'She gave me a two feedback.'
3. The correct English is...
 - (A) 'The staff is unhappy with the policy.'
 - (B) 'The staff are unhappy with the policy.'
 - (C) 'The staffs are unhappy with the policy.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. The best cross-cultural teams...
- (A) Pick one style and impose it as 'global standard'
 - (B) Make invisible norms EXPLICIT in a written operating agreement
 - (C) Avoid difficult conversations
5. 'Cross-functional' uses the prefix CROSS- to mean...
- (A) Angry
 - (B) Across / between (functions, cultures, borders)
 - (C) Wrong

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Cross-cultural vocabulary

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

Word bank: high-context · operating agreement · cross-functional · cultural default · code-switching · monoculture

1. In a ____-____ culture, 'yes, we can consider that' may mean 'no' — depending on rank and tone.

2. Every well-run cross-cultural team has a written ____ — feedback, silence and disagreement are all rendered explicit.

3. The launch team is ____-____ — product, engineering, legal and comms all sit on it.

4. Every culture has a ____ — the water it swims in without seeing.

5. She's fluent in ____-____ — direct and precise in Berlin meetings, warm and indirect with clients in São Paulo.

6. A ____ operates on implicit, unspoken rules; a cross-cultural team must codify them.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a memo (120–180 words) to Department Heads regarding the challenges and strategies for integrating cross-cultural teams. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: high-context, operating agreement, cross-functional, cultural default, code-switching, or monoculture.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, inclusive boardroom register.

Use prefixes and suffixes correctly (e.g., 'over-', 'mis-', '-ability').

Structure clearly: Cultural Landscape, Proposed Norms, Leadership Requirements.

model: Subject: Enhancing Cross-Cultural Team Integration To the Department Heads, As we expand our cross-functional teams across Berlin, Tokyo, and São Paulo, we must move away from the assumption that our local cultural default is universal. Operating as a monoculture is no longer viable; we must instead establish a formal operating agreement that codifies how we handle feedback and disagreement. For instance, teams working with high-context cultures must learn to listen for what is not being said, rather than relying solely on direct communication. This requires a high degree of code-switching from our leadership, adapting their style to suit the regional audience while maintaining a consistent strategic spine. By making these unspoken rules explicit, we reduce the risk of friction and ensure that our diversity becomes a source of competitive advantage. Success in Q4 will depend on our ability to bridge these cultural gaps effectively.

Exercise 2 — Fix the countability error

Rewrite each sentence, correcting the uncountable / plural-only noun mistake.

1. 'The manager gave me two very useful feedbacks.'

2. 'I need an advice on which vendor to choose.'

3. 'The staff is unhappy with the new hybrid policy.'

4. 'We did many researches before launching in Vietnam.'

5. 'The news about the merger were leaked yesterday.'

6. 'Our headquarter is moving to Amsterdam next quarter.'

7. 'The police is investigating the breach.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



8. 'She has many experiences in cross-cultural teams.'

Exercise 3 — Build the word (prefixes & suffixes)

Complete each sentence with the correct prefix or suffix form.

1. The team keeps OVER___ deadlines they can't meet. (verb ending in -ise / -ize)

2. We're UNDER___ on the launch — Priya's asked for two more engineers.

3. It was a total MIS___ — one side said 'we can consider it', the other heard 'yes'.

4. Every quarter we RE___ the roadmap based on what the market actually did.

5. The steering committee is CROSS-___ — product, engineering, legal and comms on it.

6. The board wants more visib___ into pipeline scalab___ — can we forecast a €5M quarter?

7. We need to STANDARD___ the review template across all four offices.

8. The OPEN___ of the Amsterdam team is one of our strengths — protect it.

Exercise 4 — Direct or indirect?

Decide whether each line is a *DIRECT* (low-context) or *INDIRECT* (high-context) way of giving the same message.

1. 'This slide is confusing — cut it.'

(A) DIRECT (low-context)

(B) INDIRECT (high-context)

2. 'I wonder if there might be a way to make this slide land more clearly for our audience.'

(A) DIRECT (low-context)

(B) INDIRECT (high-context)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. 'We can consider that.' (spoken quietly, by a senior colleague, at the end of the meeting)
(A) DIRECT (low-context)
(B) INDIRECT (high-context)
4. 'That won't work — here's why, and here's what I'd do instead.'
(A) DIRECT (low-context)
(B) INDIRECT (high-context)
5. 'It would be very interesting to hear other perspectives on this proposal before we move forward.'
(A) DIRECT (low-context)
(B) INDIRECT (high-context)
6. 'No, we shouldn't ship this. Two blockers: X and Y. Owners?'
(A) DIRECT (low-context)
(B) INDIRECT (high-context)

Exercise 5 — Rewrite the operating-agreement line

Rewrite each vague cross-cultural rule as a specific, testable norm.

1. 'We respect each other's cultures.'

2. 'We communicate clearly.'

3. 'We don't misunderstand each other.'

4. 'Everyone speaks up.'

Exercise 6 — Three managers debrief the launch

You'll hear three regional managers debrief the same cross-cultural launch. Decide who should lead the next one.

1. Which manager's debrief impresses you most, and why?

2. Which manager's debrief is 'blame the other culture'?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Which manager has insight but no structure?

Voice A (Bram, Amsterdam): The launch worked in Amsterdam. We did what we always do — clear plan, clear feedback. The Tokyo team just wouldn't tell us what they wanted. We gave them a lot of feedbacks and the staff was surprised. The Brazilians were always late. Look, we were the only office giving proper feedback. A deadline is a deadline.

Voice B (Sofía, São Paulo): In São Paulo we tend to build relationship first, then negotiate — I know this looks slow to Bram's team. What saved the launch was an operating agreement all three offices signed in month three. One: a written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness — critical decisions land in the doc. Two: improvement feedback happens in 1:1s, never in group meetings. Three: silence in a thread is not disapproval; give people 24h before reading it as anything. We're using the same agreement for Q3.

Voice C (Haruki, Tokyo): There was misunderstanding at first — but that is normal in cross-cultural work. There is often silence that Bram-san reads as disagreement, when it is actually thinking. In Tokyo we do not interrupt to prove we are engaged; we wait, and then we speak carefully. This is not disagreement. It is respect. I hope next time we can talk about this more.

Exercise 7 — Draft your team's operating agreement

Draft a 4-line CROSS-CULTURAL OPERATING AGREEMENT for a real (or invented) team spanning three cultures (max 100 words). Each line must be a testable norm — no 'we respect each other'. Cover: how YES/NO is captured; how FEEDBACK is delivered; how SILENCE is interpreted; how DISAGREEMENT is surfaced. Use at least ONE uncountable noun and ONE prefix/suffix word correctly.

Exercise 8 — Case study reflection: Currentflow launch

Currentflow 3.0 launches simultaneously across São Paulo, Berlin and Tokyo. Tokyo asks to delay by 12h. Three culturally-different launch messages exist. Answer:

1. Do you grant Tokyo's delay request? What do you write to Haruki?

2. How do you resolve three culturally-different launch messages?

3. How do you rotate on-call for the first 24h post-launch without silently punishing Tokyo?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: cross-cultural problem or plus?

1. → PROBLEM (style mismatch — direct low-context vs indirect high-context; both sides can adapt)
2. → PLUS (high-context writing style genuinely helps async decisions — protect it)
3. → PROBLEM (indirect refusal misread as consent — decisions get made on false agreement)
4. → PLUS (relationship-first cultures build trust faster; async work runs smoother on that trust)
5. → PROBLEM (imposing one culture's feedback norm as 'global standard' — quietly damages the other half)
6. → PLUS (making the invisible explicit — the single most powerful move in cross-cultural work)

Reading: High context, low context, and the middle mile

1. (B) HIGH-CONTEXT (meaning around the words) vs LOW-CONTEXT (meaning on the words)
2. (B) One style is treated as the default and the other as the deviation
3. (B) Uncountable — say 'a piece of feedback' or 'some feedback'
4. (B) Plural-only — 'the staff ARE happy' or use 'the team IS happy'
5. (B) Make the invisible EXPLICIT — a written operating agreement about how feedback, yes/no and silence work

Vocabulary: culture, prefixes and suffixes in business jargon

1. high-context
 2. under
 3. re
 4. cross
 5. visibility
 6. standardise
1. In a high-context culture, silence can often mean a polite 'no'.
 2. We need an operating agreement to avoid future clashes.
 3. Working on a cross-cultural team requires a high degree of empathy.
 4. We must standardise the review template across all our global offices.
 5. The whole project failed due to a miscommunication between the two sites.
1. 'She gave me some very useful feedback.' (or: 'a very useful PIECE of feedback')
 2. 'I need some advice about the Berlin restructure.' (or: 'a piece of advice')
 3. 'The staff ARE very happy with the new policy.' (staff = plural-only; or: 'The team IS very happy...')
 4. 'The police ARE investigating the breach.' (police = plural-only)
 5. 'We did a lot of RESEARCH on the Asian market.' (research = uncountable)
 6. 'The HEADQUARTERS ARE in Singapore.' / '...IS in Singapore.' (headquarters = plural in form, singular or plural in agreement — but never 'headquarter')
1. runbook — the other three describe cross-cultural communication; a runbook is an incident-response doc.
 2. scalable — the other three use prefixes (mis-, over-, under-); scalable uses a suffix (-able).
 3. reprioritise — the other three are noun-forming suffixes; reprioritise is a verb formed with a prefix.
 4. MFA — the other three are cross-cultural / team-design concepts; MFA is a security term.

Grammar focus: uncountable and plural-only nouns + word building

1. 'The manager gave me two very useful PIECES OF FEEDBACK after the presentation.' (or 'some very useful feedback')
 2. 'I need SOME ADVICE on which vendor to choose.' (or 'a piece of advice')
 3. 'The staff ARE unhappy with the new hybrid policy.' (or 'The team IS unhappy...')
 4. 'We did A LOT OF RESEARCH before launching in Vietnam.'
 5. 'The news about the merger WAS leaked yesterday.' (news = uncountable, singular verb)
 6. 'Our HEADQUARTERS IS moving to Amsterdam next quarter.' (never 'headquarter')
1. OVERpromising
 2. UNDERstaffed
 3. MIScommunication
 4. REprioritise
 5. CROSS-functional

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



6. -ITY (predictABILITY / scalability)

7. standardISE

8. openNESS

1. Model: 'The Tokyo staff WERE UNHAPPY with the direct FEEDBACK given in the group meeting — a classic cross-cultural misalignment.'

2. Model: 'We should RECOMMUNICATE the change of direction more clearly — the last update caused misALIGNMENT across three offices.'

3. Model: 'With HEADQUARTERS in Amsterdam and cross-border operations in six offices, we need more VISIBILITY into what each region is actually shipping.'

4. Model: 'Nobody in the meeting explicitly DISAGREED, but the polite "we can consider it" was misREAD as consent — no PROGRESS has been made since.'

Listening: three managers debrief a cross-cultural launch

1. Voice B (Sofia, São Paulo). Names her own default ('we tend to build relationship first, then negotiate'), doesn't blame the other cultures, and describes a specific OPERATING AGREEMENT the three offices signed in month three — 'a written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness; feedback happens in 1:1s, not in group meetings'. Uses 'feedback', 'progress', 'information' correctly as uncountable nouns.

2. Voice A (Bram, Amsterdam). 'The Tokyo team just wouldn't tell us what they wanted', 'the Brazilians were always late', 'we were the only office giving proper feedback'. Treats his own low-context, direct style as the neutral standard; every other culture is a 'deviation'. Also makes classic English errors — 'we gave them a lot of feedbacks', 'the staff was surprised'.

3. Voice C (Haruki, Tokyo). Kind, thoughtful, aware of the cultural gaps ('there is often silence that Bram-san reads as disagreement, when it is actually thinking'). BUT — no written operating agreement, no explicit norm about how yes / no / silence work. Six months from now, the next launch runs into the same friction because nothing structural was installed.

1. 'One: a written yes is a yes; a verbal yes may be politeness — so any critical decision has to end up in the doc. Two: improvement feedback happens in 1:1s, never in group meetings. Three: silence in a thread is not disapproval; give people 24 hours across the time zones before you read it as anything. All three offices signed off on this in month three.'

2. 'We gave them a lot of feedbacks and the staff was surprised' — two mistakes. FEEDBACK is uncountable ('a lot of feedback'). STAFF is plural-only ('the staff WERE surprised'). Both errors are typical of a manager who thinks in his L1 and hasn't yet upgraded his B2 English — same manager who assumes his cultural default is the neutral one.

3. 'There is often silence that Bram-san reads as disagreement, when in fact it is thinking. In Tokyo, we do not interrupt to prove we are engaged; we wait, and then we speak carefully. This is not disagreement. It is respect.' — This is a beautifully articulated cross-cultural pattern; unfortunately, Haruki never turns it into a written agreement, so it dies with him.

1. It means his own cultural style is INVISIBLE to him — he experiences it as 'just being professional' or 'just being clear'. Every other culture is marked ('the Tokyo team', 'the Brazilians'); his own is unmarked. That's the definition of a cultural DEFAULT — the water you swim in without seeing it. Until Bram can name his own style as ONE style among many, he'll keep imposing it as 'the standard'.

2. She's naming her own default AND acknowledging how it lands with a different culture — in one sentence. She isn't apologising for it; she isn't imposing it either. She's making it VISIBLE, so it can be discussed as a design choice, not experienced as friction. That's the single hardest move in cross-cultural leadership, and she does it in nine words.

3. Insight without structure evaporates. A cross-cultural team runs on WRITTEN agreements, not on the intuitions of one wise manager. When Haruki eventually rotates out, everything he understood about the silence-vs-disagreement pattern goes with him — because it was never captured in a doc, a norm, a policy. The lesson: turn insight into infrastructure, or watch it leak away one departure at a time.

Quiz

1. (B) AROUND the words — tone, rank and silence carry meaning
2. (B) 'She gave me two very useful pieces of feedback.'
3. (B) 'The staff are unhappy with the policy.'
4. (B) Make invisible norms EXPLICIT in a written operating agreement
5. (B) Across / between (functions, cultures, borders)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Cross-cultural vocabulary

1. high-context
2. operating agreement
3. cross-functional
4. cultural default
5. code-switching
6. monoculture

Exercise 2 — Fix the countability error

1. 'The manager gave me two very useful **PIECES OF FEEDBACK**.' (or 'some very useful feedback')
2. 'I need **SOME ADVICE** on which vendor to choose.'
3. 'The staff **ARE** unhappy with the new hybrid policy.' (or 'The team **IS** unhappy...')
4. 'We did **A LOT OF RESEARCH** before launching in Vietnam.'
5. 'The news about the merger **WAS** leaked yesterday.'
6. 'Our **HEADQUARTERS IS** moving to Amsterdam next quarter.'
7. 'The police **ARE** investigating the breach.'
8. 'She has **A LOT OF EXPERIENCE** in cross-cultural teams.' (experience = uncountable when it means know-how)

Exercise 3 — Build the word (prefixes & suffixes)

1. **OVERPROMISING** (over- + promise)
2. **UNDERSTAFFED** (under- + staff + -ed)
3. **MISCOMMUNICATION**
4. **REPRIORITISE**
5. **CROSS-FUNCTIONAL**
6. **visibility** / **scalABILITY**
7. **STANDARDISE**
8. **OPENNESS**

Exercise 4 — Direct or indirect?

1. (A) **DIRECT** (low-context)
2. (B) **INDIRECT** (high-context)
3. (B) **INDIRECT** (high-context)
4. (A) **DIRECT** (low-context)
5. (B) **INDIRECT** (high-context)
6. (A) **DIRECT** (low-context)

Exercise 5 — Rewrite the operating-agreement line

1. Model: 'Improvement feedback happens in 1:1s, not in group meetings — and applies equally to Amsterdam, Tokyo and São Paulo.'
2. Model: 'A **WRITTEN** yes is a yes; a **VERBAL** yes may be politeness — so any critical decision has to land in the doc within 24h.'
3. Model: 'Silence in a thread is not disapproval; give people 24h across the time zones before you read it as anything.'
4. Model: 'In cross-cultural meetings, we go round every region for a named question before we go to open discussion — **SO THAT** the low-context speakers don't accidentally silence the high-context ones.'

Exercise 6 — Three managers debrief the launch

1. Voice B (Sofia, São Paulo) — names her **OWN** cultural default ('we build relationship first, then negotiate'), describes a specific written operating agreement, uses uncountable/plural nouns correctly.
2. Voice A (Bram, Amsterdam) — 'Tokyo wouldn't tell us what they wanted', 'Brazilians were always late'. His own low-context, direct style is invisible to him; every other culture is a 'deviation'. Also: 'feedbacks' and 'staff was' — L1 English mistakes.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Voice C (Haruki, Tokyo) — beautifully articulates the silence-vs-disagreement pattern, but never turns it into a written norm. When he leaves, the insight leaves with him.

Exercise 8 — Case study reflection: Currentflow launch

1. Model: Third option. Written release goes out at 21:00 JST from São Paulo comms to the Japanese press list (preserves embargo). Full Japanese launch — video, customer calls, community — runs at 09:00 JST Friday (respects working hours). Tokyo team goes home at 18:00 as usual. Makes the trade-off EXPLICIT rather than imposing one culture on another.
2. Model: HYBRIDISE. ONE global spine (three facts, one boundary, one time commitment — signed by CEO) that lands identically at 12:00 UTC in all three regions. THREE regional wrappers (warmth-first in São Paulo, feature-precise in Berlin, formal in Tokyo) each region owns. Wrappers must not contradict the spine.
3. Model: Follow-the-sun. São Paulo runs 12:00–20:00 UTC → Berlin runs 20:00–04:00 UTC → Tokyo runs 04:00–12:00 UTC. Each handoff = 15-minute video overlap + written status in the shared doc. Nobody works outside normal hours; everybody's normal hours get used.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Unit 10 · B10A

AI at work

Theme: AI-augmented. Consulting mindset.



Learning objectives

- Talk honestly about where AI helps, where it hurts, and where it just sounds good in a slide.
- Use QUANTIFIERS (all, every, both, most, many, some, a few, few, hardly any, no / none) with precision — 'every' and 'most' are not interchangeable.
- Frame AI at work in terms of TRADE-OFFS, not hype: speed vs. quality, adoption vs. discernment, drafting vs. deciding.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · 'It drafts. Who decides?'

Think of *ONE* task you have handed to an AI tool in the last month at work or study. In 45 seconds out loud: (1) what did it draft, (2) how much of it survived your review, (3) what would have happened if you'd sent the first version untouched? End with 'The thing I now check every time is...'.
Was the draft 80% right and 20% quietly wrong — or the opposite?
Did you catch the errors, or did a colleague / client catch them?
Would you defend that draft in a meeting if someone challenged a number?
Bonus: which colleague on your team is over-trusting the tool right now?

Lead-in: name the quantifier trap

Match each real-sounding line (1–6) about AI at work to the quantifier trap it hides. Only *ONE* label per item.

1. 1. 'EVERY junior consultant is already using the tool — we're just formalising it.'

2. 2. 'MOST of the pushback is from a FEW people who don't understand AI.'

3. 3. 'ALL our client-facing decks now go through the copilot first.'

4. 4. 'BOTH legal AND risk have signed off.'

5. 5. 'NO consultant would send an AI draft without checking.'

6. 6. 'A FEW clients have asked whether we use AI on their work.'

followUp: Which of the six lines have YOU heard (or said) in the last quarter — and what did the speaker actually mean?

UNIVERSAL claim

CONTRADICTION inside one sentence

FALSE TOTALITY

PAIRED-UP SHIELD

ABSOLUTE DENIAL

HEDGED MINORITY

Reading: 'It drafts. We decide.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



For roughly two years, every professional-services firm in London, New York and Singapore has been quietly running the same experiment. Give a large-language-model copilot to a ring of consultants, watch the median deck-drafting time fall by something between thirty and fifty per cent, and then wait to see which firm has the first embarrassing public error. Most firms are now past that first error. The interesting question is no longer 'does the tool save time' — it obviously does — but 'which firms have built the discipline to keep the time savings without losing the client'.

The pattern in the firms that have handled it well is boringly consistent. All copilot output that touches a client — every memo, every slide, every model — is reviewed line-by-line by a named consultant at manager grade or above, who signs a shared log with their initials and the date. Not a review meeting; a signed line in a log. The rule is short enough to fit on a lanyard: it drafts, we decide. The firms that have handled it badly, by contrast, tend to share two habits. First, they conflate ADOPTION with DISCERNMENT — 'every consultant is using the tool' becomes evidence of success, when it is really just evidence of a login. Second, they measure only speed, and only in the direction that flatters them — median hours down, but never client-facing corrections up.

Both types of firm have, by now, discovered a strange second-order effect. The copilot is often best not at the task the partners bought it for (drafting) but at the task nobody quite planned for (compressing a 40-page transcript into a five-bullet 'here is what the client actually cares about'). A few firms have restructured whole workflows around this: the tool does the summary, a human writes the recommendation, and the two are stapled together with a signed cover page. Most firms are still awkwardly stuck in the middle — the tool drafts, the human 'sort of' reviews, and hardly anyone can tell you where the decision was made or by whom.

The final trap is the one nobody talks about in the town hall. If the tool is genuinely making your junior consultants two or three times more productive, the firm's answer to 'so what happens to the pyramid we've been billing against for forty years?' cannot be silence. Some firms are quietly widening the base — hiring fewer juniors, at higher standard, and telling them so. A few are widening the top — using the freed hours to send juniors into client meetings earlier. Almost none are keeping the pyramid exactly as it was and hoping nobody notices. The ones that are, are the ones whose best juniors leave first.

1. The interesting question about AI copilots in consulting is now...
 - (A) Whether the tool saves time
 - (B) Which firms build the discipline to keep the time savings without losing the client
 - (C) Which model to buy
2. The 'It drafts. We decide.' discipline requires...
 - (A) A weekly review meeting
 - (B) Line-by-line review by a named manager-or-above who signs a shared log
 - (C) A committee to approve every deck
3. The bad-firm habit of conflating ADOPTION with DISCERNMENT means...
 - (A) Everyone uses the tool AND checks it carefully
 - (B) 'Every consultant is using the tool' is treated as proof of success — really just proof of a login
 - (C) Nobody uses the tool

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. The unexpected second-order strength of the copilot is...
- (A) Writing recommendations
 - (B) Compressing long transcripts into what the client actually cares about
 - (C) Replacing partners
5. The trap nobody talks about in the town hall is...
- (A) Cost
 - (B) What the productivity gains mean for the pyramid of junior hiring
 - (C) Which vendor to choose

Vocabulary in context

Match each AI-at-work term to its plain-English meaning.

copilot — AI drafting tool integrated with a firm's knowledge base

human-in-the-loop — a named person must review and sign before output goes out

hallucination — confidently-worded but factually wrong AI output

adoption vs. discernment — using the tool ≠ using it well

the pyramid — the traditional junior-heavy staffing model in consulting

review log — a shared record of who signed off on which piece of AI output, when

Vocabulary: AI at work — tools, risks, governance

copilot / assistant — an AI tool that co-authors output alongside a human

prompt / prompting — the instruction you give the model — vague in, vague out

hallucination — confidently wrong output; the classic AI failure mode

grounding (in a source) — forcing the model to cite specific documents

guardrail — a rule the model can't cross (topics, tone, data)

context window — how much text the model can hold in mind at once

human-in-the-loop — a named person MUST scrutinise output before it is dispatched

sign-off / review log — who checked what, when — auditable

red-team (v.) — deliberately try to make the tool fail before a client does

PII (personally identifiable info) — data the tool must NEVER receive

audit trail — the log that lets you reconstruct what happened later

kill switch — one-click way to turn the tool off for a client / team

adoption — how many people log in — a superficial metric in isolation

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



discernment — how well people judge what to keep vs. rewrite

productivity uplift — measurable time saved on a defined task

the pyramid — the traditional junior-heavy staffing model

de-skilling risk — juniors never learning the underlying craft

client-facing correction — an error caught after the deliverable went out

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase from the sets above.

1. The memo cited a market-share figure that doesn't exist in any source — a textbook ____.

2. No copilot output leaves the firm until a named manager has signed the ____ ____.

3. 60% of our juniors have logged in this quarter. That's ____, not results.

4. Before we ship this to a client, let's ____ - ____ it — try to make it fail on purpose.

5. The tool must never receive ____ from a client transcript — full stop.

6. We measured a 41% ____ ____ on deck drafting — 12 hours down to 7.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/phrase from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. The model produced a <u>confidently worded but factually wrong output</u> about our Q3 revenue.

2. We require a <u>named person to scrutinise the output</u> before it goes to the client.

3. We should <u>deliberately try to make the tool fail</u> to find its weak spots.

4. The partners are confusing <u>high usage</u> with actual <u>quality of judgment</u>.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. There is a <u>danger that juniors will never learn the craft</u> if they rely too much on AI.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a brief analysis for the firm's leadership regarding the adoption of AI copilots and the necessary governance controls.

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: While we have seen a significant productivity uplift since the introduction of the AI copilot, we must distinguish between simple adoption and genuine discernment. Every consultant is now using the tool, but not all are catching the occasional hallucination that can compromise client deliverables. To mitigate this de-skilling risk, we must enforce a strict human-in-the-loop policy, requiring a manager-grade sign-off on every AI-augmented deck. We also need to implement a centralized review log to track these approvals and provide an audit trail for quality assurance. Red-teaming our internal models has shown that grounding the output in our proprietary research significantly reduces errors, though some risk remains. We must also be vigilant about PII reaching the tool during transcript processing. Recommendation: we should move away from measuring 'usage hours' and instead focus on 'client-facing corrections' to ensure our quality remains uncompromised.

Practice B — AI-at-work collocations

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

prompt — the model with a clear instruction and one source

ground — the output in the firm's own documents

review — line-by-line before it touches a client

log — the sign-off with initials and a date

red-team — the tool before the client does

publish — the metric even when it moves the wrong way

Practice C — Build an AI-governance line

Use each cluster of words to write ONE sentence for an internal policy.

1. no copilot output · client-facing · manager-or-above · signed

2. adoption · discernment · we do not measure · alone

3. PII · never · client transcripts · redacted before

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. hallucinations · monthly · client-facing corrections · publish

Practice D — Odd one out

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

1. copilot · prompt · grounding · pyramid

2. human-in-the-loop · sign-off · review log · adoption

3. hallucination · guardrail · red-team · kill switch

4. discernment · de-skilling risk · client-facing correction · context window



Grammar focus: quantifiers with precision

1. Universal quantifiers — ALL, EVERY, EACH — ALL + plural noun / uncountable: 'ALL copilot output', 'ALL the juniors'. EVERY + singular countable noun: 'EVERY memo', 'EVERY consultant'. NOT 'every memos' ✗. EACH + singular noun = one at a time, individual view: 'EACH deck is signed by a named manager.' Rule: if there is ONE exception, 'all/every' is FALSE. Downgrade to 'most' or 'almost every'.

2. 'Both' — for exactly TWO — BOTH + plural noun: 'BOTH partners signed.' BOTH ... AND ...: 'BOTH legal AND risk signed off.' Use for exactly TWO items. For three or more, use ALL: 'ALL FOUR partners signed.' 'Both' implies UNANIMITY between the two — check the meaning before you use it in a report.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Large / medium / small quantities — MOST (of the) + plural / uncountable = the majority, more than half. 'MOST junior consultants use it weekly.' MANY + plural = a large number, less specific than 'most'. SOME = an unspecified quantity, more than a couple. A FEW = a small but positive number ('a few clients asked'). FEW (no 'a') = surprisingly small, usually negative in tone ('few consultants read the policy'). HARDLY ANY = almost none — negative framing. NONE / NO = zero. 'NO PII touches the tool.' / 'NONE of the drafts went out unreviewed.'

4. Position and agreement — MOST OF + THE / MY / OUR + noun: 'MOST OF the errors were caught.' ✓ MOST + noun (no 'the') = in general: 'MOST firms have hit their first error.' ✓ 'MOST of firms' ✗ — either 'most firms' OR 'most of THE firms'. With EVERY/EACH the verb is SINGULAR: 'Every consultant HAS a login.' NOT 'Every consultants have...' ✗. With NONE the verb can be singular or plural — singular is safer in writing: 'None of the drafts was sent unreviewed.'

5. Common traps — • 'Every / all people' ✗ → 'Everyone' or 'all people' is fine; 'every people' is not. • 'Most of consultants' ✗ → 'Most consultants' OR 'Most of THE consultants'. • 'Both of them are signed' ≠ 'They are both signed' — same meaning, but the second is what natives write. • 'A few / few' — swapping these reverses your meaning. 'A few clients asked' = positive; 'Few clients asked' = disappointingly few. • 'No / none' — 'no' + noun ('no PII'); 'none' stands alone ('None reached the client').

Exercise A — Choose the precise quantifier

For each sentence, choose the quantifier that is honest, not just impressive.

1. ___ our client-facing decks go through the copilot first — with one exception, a pharma engagement that forbids it. (ALL / MOST)

2. ___ pushback is coming from ___ partners. (MOST ... A FEW / MOST ... FEW)

3. ___ legal ___ risk have signed off. (BOTH ... AND / EVERY ... AND)

4. ___ consultant has completed the AI-use training. (EVERY / ALL)

5. ___ PII from client transcripts reaches the tool. (NO / NONE)

Exercise B — Rewrite the exaggeration

Each line is too strong to be true. Rewrite it with a HONEST quantifier.

1. 'Every consultant is already using the tool.'

2. 'All our decks are reviewed line-by-line.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. 'No consultant would ever send an AI draft without checking.'

4. 'Both risk and legal love it.'

Exercise C — Fix the grammar

Correct the quantifier error in each sentence.

1. 'Every consultants have completed the training.'

2. 'Most of firms have hit their first client-facing error.'

3. 'A few clients asked — hardly a signal.'

4. 'No PII touch the tool.'

Listening: three partners on the copilot rollout

You're the Managing Partner. Three partners have 90 seconds each to give you their read on the firm-wide copilot rollout. You're listening for: (1) who uses quantifiers HONESTLY, (2) who conflates ADOPTION with DISCERNMENT, (3) who names the ONE thing that would change their mind, (4) whose recommendation would survive contact with a Tier-1 client.

pre

Which partner will you trust most before you hear them? And is that because of what they know, or because of how they sound?

What ONE quantifier ('all', 'most', 'a few') will you flag every time it's used loosely?

gist

1. Which partner's recommendation gets adopted, and why?

2. Which partner runs on ADOPTION dressed as success?

3. Which partner has good instincts but no discipline?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



detail

1. What EXACTLY is Anika's rule for a draft that touches a client?

2. What is Julian's answer when asked about the one client-facing error last month?

Third listen — designer vs default

Focus on the *QUANTIFIERS* each partner reaches for. Answer from what they say, not from what they seem to mean.

1. Anika uses 'MOST ... with a carve-out', 'A FEW clients', 'HARDLY ANY'. What is that showing you as MP?

2. Julian uses 'EVERY junior', 'ALL our decks', 'MASSIVE uplift'. What does that language reveal?

3. Diego says 'in most cases', 'sort of', 'we should probably'. What is the risk you carry away?

Language from the audio — quantifier moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it *DOES* for the speaker.

"MOST client-facing decks — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement." — downgrades 'all' to 'most' AND names the exception — the honest partner move

"A FEW Tier-1 clients have proactively asked — I read that as the first three of many." — hedged minority upgraded to a signal — reads the leading edge, doesn't wait for 'most'

"HARDLY ANY drafts went out unreviewed — the ones that did are in the log." — admits the number is not zero AND shows the audit trail exists — trust through evidence, not claim

"EVERY junior is using it — MASSIVE uplift across the board." — universal claim + intensifier + no numbers = adoption dressed as success; the tell of a partner who hasn't audited

"In MOST cases, we sort of review the output — most of the time." — hedged frequency with no rule and no signer — good instinct, zero discipline

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



"NO copilot output leaves this firm to a client until a named manager has signed the log." — the discipline in one sentence — 'no' + named signer + auditable log

Voice A (Julian): Look, the numbers speak for themselves. EVERY junior on my team is using the copilot — I mean literally every one. ALL our client-facing decks go through the tool first. We're seeing MASSIVE uplift across the board — drafting time is down, morale is up. Yes, there was that one memo last month, but honestly, one-off. Everyone learned from it. We should be rolling this out to all 400 consultants yesterday.

Voice B (Anika): OK. Here's what I actually see in my practice. MOST client-facing decks — with a clearly-flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement, which the contract forbids — go through the copilot first. A FEW Tier-1 clients have proactively asked whether we use AI on their work, and I read that as the first three of many. HARDLY ANY drafts went out unreviewed last quarter, but the ones that did are in the log — three of them, all in the same week, one signer over-loaded. My rule is simple: NO copilot output leaves this firm to a client until a named manager at grade above has signed the log with initials and a date. Two client-facing corrections in a quarter and I pull the tool from that practice — that's the number that would change my mind.

Voice C (Diego): I mean, I hear both of them. In MOST cases, we sort of review the output — most of the time. I think we should probably have some kind of sign-off. The risk is real, obviously — this can't just be a login, right? But I don't want to slow the team down with too much process. Maybe a light-touch review? We should probably discuss it more.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second copilot brief to your MP

Solo task. You are one of the three partners. Give your 90-second brief to the Managing Partner. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds). You MUST: (1) use at least THREE quantifiers HONESTLY (name at least one exception when you say 'most' or 'all'); (2) name your ONE human-in-the-loop RULE in a single testable sentence; (3) name the ONE metric that would change your mind — and in which direction; (4) end with what YOUR practice will publish monthly.

Scene: Your real current team (recommended)

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: the Managing Partner, 90 seconds, no slides.

Scene: A firm you're advising as a consultant

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: their MP, same rules, same time.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Scene: A department that has just piloted an AI tool

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: the CEO who signed the pilot budget.

Extra speaking task — 30-second 'one rule, one metric'

Compress your brief to *ONE* rule you will *INSTALL* next week — and the *ONE* metric that would kill the rollout. Record a **30-second voice note**. Format: 'Starting Monday, no ____ until _____. If _____ in a quarter, we pull the tool from that practice.'

Writing mini-task

Write the *ONE*-page 'How this firm uses AI' policy (max 130 words). It must contain: (1) the *HUMAN-IN-THE-LOOP* rule in one sentence; (2) the *THREE* monthly *METRICS* (one speed, one quality, one trust); (3) at least *ONE* quantifier ('most / a few / hardly any') used *HONESTLY*, with a named exception. Sign it with a real role.

Wrap-up

One *QUANTIFIER* from today (most / a few / hardly any / none) you'll use with a *NAMED EXCEPTION* next time.

One universal claim ('every...', 'all...') you'll actively *STOP* using without a carve-out.

One line for your team's AI-use policy that you'll draft this week and get signed by Friday.

Quiz

- Which sentence uses quantifiers *HONESTLY*?
 - 'Every consultant is using the tool and every deck is perfect.'
 - 'Most client-facing decks go through the tool — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement.'
 - 'All feedback has been massively positive.'
- The correct pattern is...
 - 'Every consultants have completed the training.'
 - 'Every consultant has completed the training.'
 - 'Every consultants has completed the training.'
- 'Both' is correctly used when...
 - Three teams have signed off
 - Exactly two teams / people have signed off
 - You want to sound emphatic

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. The safest 'human-in-the-loop' rule reads...
- (A) 'We try to review most of the output.'
 - (B) 'No copilot output reaches a client until a named manager-or-above has signed the review log (initials + date).'
 - (C) 'Legal has approved the tool.'
5. 'Most of firms have shipped their first error' is...
- (A) Correct
 - (B) Wrong — 'MOST FIRMS' or 'MOST OF THE FIRMS', never 'most of firms'
 - (C) Correct in informal writing

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — AI-at-work vocabulary

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

Word bank: hallucination · human-in-the-loop · review log · red-team · adoption · discernment · kill switch

1. The memo cited a market-share figure with no basis in any source — a textbook ____.

2. No copilot output goes to a client until a ____ - ____ - ____ - ____ has signed the log.

3. Every sign-off is captured in the ____ ____ — initials, date, link.

4. Before we ship this externally, let's ____ - ____ it — try to make it fail on purpose.

5. 70% of juniors logged in this quarter — that constitutes ____, not results.

6. The number we can't measure yet is ____ — how well people judge what to keep vs. rewrite.

7. If the client-facing correction rate doubles, we hit the ____ ____ and turn it off for that account.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a policy proposal (120–180 words) for the Partners regarding the implementation of Generative AI in the firm. Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: *hallucination*, *human-in-the-loop*, *review log*, *red-team*, *adoption*, *discernment*, or *kill switch*.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, cautious yet forward-looking register.

Use precise quantifiers (e.g., 'most', 'hardly any', 'a few').

Structure clearly: Opportunity, Risk Mitigation, Performance Metrics.

model: Subject: Policy for Generative AI Implementation To the Partners, The pilot results for our generative AI integration show high levels of adoption, yet we must remain vigilant regarding output quality. We have identified several instances of hallucination where the tool fabricated market data, reinforcing the necessity of our 'human-in-the-loop' requirement. No AI-generated deliverable may be sent to a client without being recorded in the review log by a manager. To further harden our defences, I recommend we red-team our most sensitive prompts to identify potential failure modes. Furthermore, we must invest in training to improve the discernment of our staff—ensuring they can distinguish between high-quality insights and generic filler. If the rate of uncorrected errors exceeds 2%, we will activate the kill switch for that specific use case. Our goal is to leverage efficiency without compromising client trust.

Exercise 2 — Quantifier precision

Rewrite each exaggerated sentence with an HONEST quantifier ('most', 'a few', 'hardly any', 'none') and — where relevant — name the exception.

1. 'Every consultant is already using the tool.'

2. 'All our client-facing decks go through the copilot first.'

3. 'No consultant would send an AI draft without checking.'

4. 'Both risk and legal love it.'

5. 'A few Tier-1 clients have asked — hardly a signal.'

Exercise 3 — Quantifier grammar

Correct the ONE error in each sentence.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'Every consultants have completed the training.'

2. 'Most of firms have hit their first client-facing error.'

3. 'Both of the four partners signed off.'

4. 'No PII touch the tool.'

5. 'None of the drafts were sent unreviewed, everyone was.'

Exercise 4 — Honest or adoption-dressed-as-success?

Decide whether each line is *HONEST* (uses quantifiers with a named exception / consequence) or *ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS* (universal, unnumbered, unfalsifiable).

1. 'Most client-facing decks — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement — go through the copilot.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
2. 'Every junior is using the tool — massive uplift across the board.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
3. 'Hardly any drafts went out unreviewed — the ones that did are in the log.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
4. 'All feedback has been positive.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
5. 'A few Tier-1 clients have asked — I read it as the first three of many.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
6. 'Everyone learned from the one client-facing error last month.'
(A) HONEST
(B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Rewrite the hype line as a policy line

Rewrite each hype line as a testable one-sentence policy that a manager would sign under.

1. 'We're rolling AI out firm-wide — the future is here.'

2. 'AI will save junior consultants massive amounts of time.'

3. 'Every consultant will be trained on the tool.'

4. 'Client data is safe.'

Exercise 6 — Three partners on the copilot rollout

You'll hear three partners brief the Managing Partner on their practice's copilot rollout. Decide which recommendation you'd sign under.

1. Whose recommendation would you take to the partner call, and why?

2. Whose brief is adoption dressed as success?

3. Whose brief has instinct but no discipline?

Voice A (Julian): Every junior on my team is using the copilot — literally every one. All our client-facing decks go through the tool first. Massive uplift across the board. Yes, there was that one memo last month, but it's a one-off. Everyone learned from it. Roll to 400.

Voice B (Anika): MOST client-facing decks — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement — go through the copilot. A FEW Tier-1 clients have proactively asked; I read it as the leading edge. HARDLY ANY drafts went out unreviewed; the exceptions are in the log. My rule: NO copilot output leaves this firm to a client until a named manager-or-above has signed the log. Two client-facing corrections in a quarter and I pull the tool from that practice — that's the number.

Voice C (Diego): In most cases we sort of review the output — most of the time. I think we should probably have some kind of sign-off. The risk is real, this can't just be a login. But I don't want to slow the team down. Maybe a light-touch review. We should probably discuss it more.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 7 — Write your team's AI-use policy

Write your OWN team's ONE-PAGE 'How we use AI' policy (max 130 words). Cover: (1) the human-in-the-loop rule, in one testable sentence; (2) the three monthly metrics (speed, quality, trust); (3) at least ONE quantifier ('most', 'a few', 'hardly any') used HONESTLY with a named exception. Sign it with a real role.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: name the quantifier trap

1. → UNIVERSAL claim, almost never true — the loud minority stands in for the median.
2. → CONTRADICTION inside one sentence — 'most' pushback from 'few' people can't both be true.
3. → FALSE TOTALITY — one exception ('this pharma client won't allow it') and the claim collapses.
4. → PAIRED-UP SHIELD — 'both' implies unanimity; sign-off means 'not illegal', not 'good idea'.
5. → ABSOLUTE DENIAL — every 'no' at this scale hides at least one Tuesday afternoon at 17:55.
6. → HEDGED MINORITY — 'a few' is soft cover for 'this is now on every Tier-1 client's radar and we should get ahead of it.'

Reading: 'It drafts. We decide.'

1. (B) Which firms build the discipline to keep the time savings without losing the client
2. (B) Line-by-line review by a named manager-or-above who signs a shared log
3. (B) 'Every consultant is using the tool' is treated as proof of success — really just proof of a login
4. (B) Compressing long transcripts into what the client actually cares about
5. (B) What the productivity gains mean for the pyramid of junior hiring

Vocabulary: AI at work — tools, risks, governance

1. hallucination
 2. review log
 3. adoption
 4. red-team
 5. PII
 6. productivity uplift
1. The model produced a hallucination about our Q3 revenue.
 2. We require a human-in-the-loop before it goes to the client.
 3. We should red-team the tool to find its weak spots.
 4. The partners are confusing adoption with actual discernment.
 5. There is a de-skilling risk if juniors rely too much on AI.
1. No copilot output goes to a client until a manager-or-above has signed the review log — no exceptions.
 2. Adoption is not a KPI on its own — we measure discernment (kept vs. rewritten) alongside it.
 3. PII from client transcripts is redacted before any text reaches the tool — never after.
 4. We publish client-facing corrections per 100 deliverables monthly, so hallucinations show up as a number, not a rumour.
1. pyramid — the other three are about USING the tool; pyramid is about staffing structure.
 2. adoption — the other three are governance controls; adoption is a usage metric.
 3. hallucination — the other three are DEFENCES; hallucination is the FAILURE they defend against.
 4. context window — the other three are consequences of how humans use the tool; context window is a technical limit of the model.

Grammar focus: quantifiers with precision

1. MOST — 'all' is false because of the pharma exception. 'Most' with an explicit carve-out is the honest word.
 2. MOST ... A FEW — but flag the contradiction to the speaker. If it's really 'a few' partners, it can't really be 'most' pushback.
 3. BOTH ... AND — 'both' is right because there are exactly TWO teams.
 4. EVERY — 'every' takes a SINGULAR noun ('consultant'). 'All consultants have...' would also be right, but the two are not interchangeable grammatically.
 5. NO — 'no' takes a noun. 'NONE reaches the tool' would also work ('none' stands alone).
1. 'MOST junior consultants use the tool weekly; a smaller share of partners have adopted it.'
 2. 'The MAJORITY of client-facing decks are reviewed line-by-line; the exceptions are logged and reviewed at the following week's quality huddle.'
 3. 'HARDLY ANY consultant sends a draft without checking — but the audit trail exists precisely because the exception is not zero.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. 'BOTH risk AND legal have signed off that the tool is contractually usable; neither has yet endorsed unrestricted use.'
1. 'EVERY CONSULTANT HAS completed the training.' (Every + singular noun + singular verb.)
2. 'MOST FIRMS have hit their first error.' OR 'MOST OF THE FIRMS have hit their first error.' (Not 'most of firms'.)
3. Depending on meaning: 'A FEW clients asked' = 'some did, it's real' (positive). If the speaker means 'not many', use 'FEW clients asked — hardly a signal.'
4. 'NO PII TOUCHES the tool.' ('PII' is uncountable / treated as singular; use a singular verb.)

Listening: three partners on the copilot rollout

1. Voice B (Anika). She uses quantifiers honestly: 'MOST decks — with a clearly-flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement', 'A FEW Tier-1 clients have proactively asked', 'HARDLY ANY drafts went out unreviewed — the ones that did are in the log'. Names the ONE thing that would change her mind: two client-facing corrections in a quarter.
2. Voice A (Julian). 'EVERY junior is using it', 'ALL our decks now go through the tool', 'we're seeing MASSIVE uplift'. No numbers, no exceptions, no named person doing the review — logins as proof. This is exactly the language that produces a Tier-1 client catching the error before you do.
3. Voice C (Diego). Sees the risk ('this can't just be a login'), but names no rule, no signer, no metric. Everything is 'we should probably', 'kind of', 'in most cases'. Six weeks from now, his practice will have both Anika's caveats AND Julian's blind spots — the worst of both.
 1. No copilot output — memo, slide, model — leaves the firm to a client, or is presented in a client-facing meeting, until a named consultant at Manager grade or above has signed the review log (initials + date) confirming (a) every number checked against source and (b) the recommendation is one they would defend in the room.
 2. He calls it 'a one-off', says 'EVERYONE learned from it', and moves back to the 41% deck-drafting uplift. He never names WHO reviewed the memo before it went out, or what specifically changed in the process after the client caught it. That's the tell.
 1. She is telling you where the exceptions are BEFORE you find them yourself. That is what a partner sounds like when they've genuinely walked their own book — the number is downgraded from 'all' to 'most' because she can name the one client that isn't.
 2. It reveals that he is presenting adoption as evidence of quality. 'Every' at 400-consultant scale is almost never true — one Tuesday afternoon at 17:55 breaks it. The strong quantifier is the tell: he has not gone looking for the exception, which means the client will.
 3. He has correctly diagnosed the risk (adoption ≠ discernment) but he has no RULE and no SIGNER. Hedged instincts do not survive contact with a busy Tuesday. Within a quarter, his practice will look exactly like Julian's — same output, same first client-facing error, but with the added trap that Diego 'saw it coming' and didn't act.

Quiz

1. (B) 'Most client-facing decks go through the tool — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement.'
2. (B) 'Every consultant has completed the training.'
3. (B) Exactly two teams / people have signed off
4. (B) 'No copilot output reaches a client until a named manager-or-above has signed the review log (initials + date).'
5. (B) Wrong — 'MOST FIRMS' or 'MOST OF THE FIRMS', never 'most of firms'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — AI-at-work vocabulary

1. hallucination
2. human-in-the-loop
3. review log
4. red-team
5. adoption
6. discernment
7. kill switch

Exercise 2 — Quantifier precision

1. 'MOST junior consultants use the tool weekly; adoption among senior partners is significantly lower.'
2. 'MOST client-facing decks go through the copilot first — with a flagged carve-out for the pharma engagement, which the contract forbids.'
3. 'HARDLY ANY consultant sends a draft without checking — the exceptions are in the review log, three cases last quarter.'
4. 'BOTH risk AND legal have signed off that the tool is contractually usable; neither has endorsed unrestricted use.'
5. 'A FEW Tier-1 clients have proactively asked in the last month; I read that as the leading edge, not the whole wave.'

Exercise 3 — Quantifier grammar

1. 'EVERY consultant HAS completed the training.' (Every + singular noun + singular verb.)
2. 'MOST FIRMS have hit their first error.' OR 'MOST OF THE FIRMS have hit their first error.'
3. 'ALL FOUR partners signed off.' (BOTH is for exactly TWO.)
4. 'NO PII TOUCHES the tool.' (PII treated as uncountable → singular verb.)
5. 'NONE OF THE DRAFTS WAS sent unreviewed.' (In writing, NONE + singular verb is safer and more consulting-register.)

Exercise 4 — Honest or adoption-dressed-as-success?

1. (A) HONEST
2. (B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
3. (A) HONEST
4. (B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS
5. (A) HONEST
6. (B) ADOPTION-AS-SUCCESS

Exercise 5 — Rewrite the hype line as a policy line

1. 'From September 1st, the copilot is available to 90 consultants across four offices. It drafts. We decide. No copilot output goes to a client until a Manager-or-above has signed the review log — no exceptions.'
2. 'We will publish monthly: (1) median hours from brief to first-draft deck, (2) client-facing corrections per 100 deliverables, (3) % of Tier-1 clients proactively told about the tool and NOT opting out.'
3. 'Every consultant using the tool must complete a 45-minute AI-use module and sign the acceptable-use policy before their login is enabled — logged and dated in HR.'
4. 'PII from client transcripts is redacted BEFORE any text reaches the tool. Redaction is verified by a named consultant, initialled in the log. Two failures in a quarter and the practice loses access.'

Exercise 6 — Three partners on the copilot rollout

1. Voice B (Anika). Uses quantifiers honestly ('MOST with a carve-out', 'A FEW clients', 'HARDLY ANY'), names the review rule ('no output leaves until a named manager signs the log'), names the kill-metric (two client-facing corrections in a quarter → tool pulled).
2. Voice A (Julian). 'EVERY junior', 'ALL decks', 'MASSIVE uplift' — universal claims, no named signer, no kill-metric, deflects on the one client-facing error.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Voice C (Diego). Correctly diagnoses the risk ('this can't just be a login') but hedges every sentence ('in most cases', 'sort of', 'we should probably') and names no rule, no signer, no metric.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Unit 10 · B10B

The consulting mindset

Theme: AI-augmented. Consulting mindset.



Learning objectives

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · 'On one page'

Think of the *LAST* problem you presented at work — to a boss, a client, a team. In 45 seconds out loud, present the *SAME* problem in *ONE* page: (1) one sentence on *WHAT* the problem is, (2) one sentence on the *HYPOTHESIS* you have about it, (3) two options you'd consider, (4) which one you'd back and why. End with 'The one number I'd need to confirm this is...'.
Did you *START* with the problem, or with the solution you'd already chosen?
Is your hypothesis testable — or is it a preference disguised as an insight?
Do the two options genuinely differ, or is one a strawman to make the other look good?
Bonus: which of the two would your CFO actually let you fund?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. 6. 'Client wants ROI.'

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

PRECISE

VAGUE (should be more specific)

WRONG (grammatically off)

Reading: 'The one-page brief'

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Vocabulary in context

Match each consulting term to its plain-English meaning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the executive summary — the whole document in five lines

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

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

risks and rewards — downside and upside — always together

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

carrot and stick — reward and consequence — the two levers

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

the deliverable — the artefact you owe by the deadline

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

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

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

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE phrase from the sets above.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/expression from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. We need to identify the real question the client is asking at the top of the memo.

2. Every proposal must include the number that would make us stop the project.

3. Choosing this path involves a sacrifice of speed for higher security.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

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

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

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

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

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

Practice B — Consultant collocations

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

frame — the problem before you propose the solution

test — the hypothesis with two data points, not ten

name — the trade-off honestly, not just the upside

sign — the recommendation with your own name

publish — the kill-metric alongside the recommendation

avoid — boiling the ocean when the deadline is Friday

Practice C — Build a consulting sentence

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

Practice D — Odd one out

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

1. hypothesis · framing question · recommendation · scope creep

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

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

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



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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Exercise B — Fix the article

Each line has ONE article error. Correct it.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. 'There are good things and bad things about the plan.'

2. 'It's risky but there's a big upside if it works.'

3. 'This will hurt for a bit but pay off later.'

4. 'Here are the things to do and not do.'

5. 'There aren't enough of the specialists everyone wants.'

Listening: three juniors present the same problem

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

pre

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

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

gist

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

2. Which junior boiled the ocean?

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

detail

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

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

Third listen — the article / word-pair tell

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

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

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

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

Language from the audio — consulting-register moves worth stealing

Match each phrase to what it DOES for the speaker.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Scene: A real current decision at work (recommended)

A: You brief.

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

Scene: A friend / family member's business decision

A: You brief.

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

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

A: You brief.

B: Imagined listener: the chair of the board.

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

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

Writing mini-task

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

Wrap-up

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

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

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

Quiz

1. The correct article use is...

(A) 'We recommend the pilot with a Berlin practice.'

(B) 'We recommend a pilot with the Berlin practice.'

(C) 'We recommend a pilot with a Berlin practice.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Consulting-mindset vocabulary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Exercise 1b — Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a strategic brief (120–180 words) for a client engagement regarding a major business decision.

Incorporate at least four phrases from Exercise 1: framing question, hypothesis, trade-off, kill-metric, scope creep, elephant in the room, or boil the ocean.

type: writing

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items from the unit.

Maintain a formal, consulting-style register.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 3 — Fix the article error

Correct the *ONE* article error in each sentence.

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

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

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

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

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

Exercise 4 — Framed or unframed?

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

1. 'The client asked how to open 40 stores. The real question is where to spend the FY27 budget to preserve optionality.'
(A) FRAMED
(B) UNFRAMED
2. 'We surveyed 200 stores and did a competitive benchmark. Three options: expand aggressively, expand carefully, expand very carefully.'
(A) FRAMED
(B) UNFRAMED
3. 'Our working hypothesis: concentrated expansion maximises year-one revenue but destroys optionality if that region softens.'
(A) FRAMED
(B) UNFRAMED
4. 'The client kind of wants to expand — there are pros and cons.'
(A) FRAMED
(B) UNFRAMED

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. 'Two genuinely different options: 40 stores in one region OR 10 stores in four. The trade-off is revenue vs. optionality.'

(A) FRAMED

(B) UNFRAMED

6. 'In most cases we should probably consider a pilot of some kind.'

(A) FRAMED

(B) UNFRAMED

Exercise 5 — Rewrite with a word-pair collocation

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

1. 'There are good things and bad things about the plan.'

2. 'It's risky but there's a big upside if it works.'

3. 'This will hurt for a bit but pay off later.'

4. 'Here are the things to do and not do.'

5. 'There aren't enough of the specialists everyone wants.'

Exercise 6 — Three juniors present the same problem

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

1. Whose brief will you take to the client, and why?

2. Whose brief 'boiled the ocean'?

3. Whose brief has instinct but no discipline?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

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

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

Exercise 7 — Your one-page brief

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

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

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

Reading: 'The one-page brief'

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

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

1. hypothesis
 2. pros and cons
 3. scope creep
 4. elephant in the room
 5. ask
 6. boil the ocean
1. We need to identify the framing question at the top of the memo.
 2. Every proposal must include a kill-metric.
 3. Choosing this path involves a trade-off between speed and security.
 4. We must avoid scope creep beyond the agreed fee.
 5. Don't boil the ocean; just focus on the three core markets.
1. Expanding into Brazil in FY26 offers a first-mover reward in health-tech and a currency-and-regulatory risk equal in magnitude — the risks and rewards are, honestly, of the same order.
 2. Pros: 41% drafting uplift, junior morale, faster client turnaround. Cons: one client-facing error already, and adoption is not discernment. Recommendation on the next page.
 3. Restructuring the sales team hits short-term revenue for one quarter in exchange for a long-term rebuild of the pipeline — the trade-off is one bad quarter for two years of predictable growth.
 4. The AI policy fits on one page: the do's (name the reviewer, log the sign-off, publish the corrections) and the don'ts (no PII, no unreviewed client output, no 'everyone learned from it' as an explanation) sit side by side.
1. scope creep — the other three are STAGES of a one-page brief; scope creep is a project-management pathology.
 2. boil the ocean — the other three are word-pair collocations that structure a brief; boil the ocean is a warning about analysis.
 3. the elephant in the room — the other three are things you OWE the client; the elephant is a thing you must NAME.
 4. plausible deniability — the other three are things a good brief HAS; plausible deniability is what a good brief REMOVES.

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Listening: three juniors present the same problem

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

Quiz

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Consulting-mindset vocabulary

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

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

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

Exercise 3 — Fix the article error

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

Exercise 4 — Framed or unframed?

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

Exercise 5 — Rewrite with a word-pair collocation

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

Exercise 6 — Three juniors present the same problem

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

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
