



UNIT 1A · BUSINESS C1

The first ninety seconds

Class Book and Workbook · one complete unit

OBJECTIVES

What you'll be able to do

4 min

- Describe executive presence with C1 precision — gravitas, poise, self-possession.
- Use inversion for emphasis in formal and public-facing register.
- Analyse and rehearse the first ninety seconds of a high-stakes encounter.
- Discuss body language and status signalling with nuance and hedging.

LEAD-IN

First frame — what did you already decide?

8 min

FRAME 1 · 0.4 SECONDS AFTER THE DOOR OPENS

Study the image for exactly ten seconds, then close your eyes. Reconstruct as much as you can in writing — and be honest about what you inferred rather than saw.

- What is his job, in your snap judgement? How senior?
- Whose meeting is it — his, or theirs? What tells you?
- List three cues you read before he says a word. Which are cultivated, which are rehearsed, which are accidental?
- Rewrite the scene from the point of view of a board member who is unimpressed. What are they noticing?

The teacher will collect two columns on the board: read as belonging vs read as visiting. Notice how much of that verdict was delivered in your first three seconds.

READING

The ninety-second economy

15 min

Most professionals will insist that first impressions are unfair. They are also, unfortunately, decisive. Reams of behavioural research now converge on a startling window: within roughly ninety seconds of meeting you, a counterparty has taken a rough view of your competence, warmth, and status — and the rest of the conversation, more often than not, is spent rationalising that first snapshot rather than revising it. Executives who resent this fact tend to lose to executives who quietly plan for it.

What the research does not say — and what junior professionals routinely mishear — is that "first impressions" are a matter of theatricality. They are not. The candidates who read as most credible in laboratory studies are almost never the loudest. They tend to enter rooms as if they were already expected to be there; they speak at a measured pace, ask a question before making a claim, and treat the receptionist with the same attention they reserve for the CEO. If there is a single unifying trait, it is the absence of striving. The person who is trying to be impressive is, almost by definition, not.

Interestingly, the effect is asymmetric. A poor first ninety seconds can be recovered from — the research suggests it takes, on average, some eight subsequent positive interactions to erase a single bad one — but the recovery is expensive and slow, and in a market where senior calendars are triaged in fifteen-minute windows, few professionals are given eight interactions to work with. It is far cheaper, though not much easier, to invest in the entrance.

For years, coaches marketed this as "executive presence" — a phrase that has since become both ubiquitous and slightly hollow. What is meant, more precisely, is a bundle of visible cues (posture, vocal pace, eye contact, the willingness to pause) held together by an invisible one: the settled assumption that you belong in the room. That last cue cannot be faked for long; it is either being cultivated or being rehearsed. Rehearsal reads. Cultivation, oddly, does not.

Choose the best answer.

- According to the text, most of the conversation after a first impression is spent:

- (a) carefully revising the initial view
- (b) confirming the initial view
- (c) gathering neutral data
- (d) waiting for a second impression

Answer key: (b) confirming the initial view

- The 'unifying trait' of credible candidates is:

- (a) a loud, confident voice
- (b) the absence of striving
- (c) the use of frameworks
- (d) impeccable clothing

Answer key: (b) the absence of striving

- A poor first impression, the writer suggests, is:

- (a) essentially irreversible
- (b) recoverable but expensive
- (c) irrelevant after ninety seconds
- (d) easily fixed in one meeting

Answer key: (b) recoverable but expensive

- 'Executive presence' is described as:

- (a) a set of visible cues held together by a settled sense of belonging
- (b) primarily a matter of vocabulary
- (c) a synonym for charisma
- (d) a fashionable but empty phrase

Answer key: (a) a set of visible cues held together by a settled sense of belonging

- The final line suggests that rehearsed presence:

- (a) is undetectable if practised enough
- (b) is visible to observers
- (c) is preferable to cultivated presence
- (d) is the same as cultivation

Answer key: (b) is visible to observers

Teacher notes

Follow-up discussion: Ask students to identify the sentence in the article that most challenges their own habits. Push for a specific personal example.

AUTHENTIC READING · REAL TEXT

Executive presence: what the phrase actually means

Source: Adapted from Harvard Business Review — 'Executive Presence Has Three Parts' · Excerpted for classroom use under fair-dealing for educational commentary.

C1+

≈ 340 words

Sylvia Ann Hewlett's research at the Center for Talent Innovation broke 'executive presence' down into three measurable components. Read this adapted summary and answer the questions.

For decades, 'executive presence' was the promotion criterion that hiring managers reached for when they could not name why one candidate had been chosen over another. Hewlett's team, surveying more than 4,000 college-educated professionals in the United States, set out to make the phrase auditable — and, to the surprise of many senior leaders, they did.

Their conclusion was that presence rests on three legs, and only three. The first, and heaviest, is *gravitas* — the sense that a person can be trusted in a crisis. *Gravitas*, in the study, was scored on grace under fire, decisiveness, integrity, emotional intelligence, and the ability to project a vision. It accounted for roughly 67% of what senior leaders meant when they said someone 'had it'.

The second leg, communication, accounted for another 28% — and here the finding was that specific mechanical habits mattered more than eloquence. The single strongest predictor was the ability to command a room; the second was the ability to read one. Neither, notably, was vocabulary.

The final leg — appearance — accounted for the remaining 5%. The study was widely misreported on this point: the researchers did not conclude that appearance was decisive; they concluded that appearance functioned as a gate. Get it obviously wrong and the other two legs never got a fair hearing. Get it competently right and it disappeared from the assessment altogether.

The uncomfortable implication, for junior professionals hoping to shortcut the curriculum, is that the ratio does not shift with effort. You cannot compensate for missing *gravitas* with better slides. You can, however, quietly rehearse the parts of communication that are teachable — pace, pause, and the willingness to be interrupted without losing the thread — while the harder work of building *gravitas* is done, as it always was, by handling harder problems in front of more difficult audiences.

1. READ FOR GIST

- 1. What are Hewlett's three components of executive presence, in order of weight?

Answer key: Gravitas (~67%), communication (~28%), appearance (~5%).

- 2. Which one was most misreported?

Answer key: Appearance — the study did not say it was decisive; it said it functioned as a gate.

2. READ FOR DETAIL

- 1. Name two things that fed into the 'gravitas' score.

Answer key: Any two of: grace under fire, decisiveness, integrity, emotional intelligence, ability to project a vision.

- 2. What was the strongest predictor of strong communication in the study?

Answer key: The ability to command a room; the second was reading the room. Vocabulary was not.

- 3. Why is 'appearance' described as a gate?

Answer key: Get it obviously wrong and the other two legs never get a fair hearing; get it competently right and it disappears from the assessment.

- 4. What is the 'uncomfortable implication' the writer draws?

Answer key: You cannot compensate for missing gravitas with better slides — the ratio does not shift with effort on the wrong leg.

3. GLOSSARY

auditable

able to be measured and checked, not just felt

grace under fire

the ability to stay composed in a difficult, public moment

eloquence

polished, articulate speech

shortcut the curriculum

skip the slow, difficult stages of learning

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Do you think the 67/28/5 ratio holds in your industry, or does one leg dominate?
- Where is the line, in your culture, between building gravitas and 'faking' it?
- If you had one hour a week for a year, which leg would you invest in — and why?

5. WRITING TASK · DISCURSIVE

Choose the leg (gravitas, communication or appearance) on which you have most to gain. Write a 180–220-word personal audit: current state, one concrete gap, and one measurable move you will make in the next 90 days.

- Open with a cleft (What I lack most is... / It is X that...).
- Use at least one inverted structure.
- Include one item you will stop doing — not only things you will start.

Write at least 180 words.

VOCABULARY

The language of presence

12 min

Match each term to its definition.

- gravitas
a quiet, weighty seriousness that commands respect
- poise
controlled composure under scrutiny, especially in high-stakes settings
- polish
the fluent, well-finished quality of an experienced professional
- conviction
the visible confidence that comes from believing what you say
- warmth
an interpersonal quality that signals approachability and trust
- self-possession
the ability to remain calm and centred, unshaken by pressure
- authenticity
coming across as consistent, unrehearsed and true to yourself
- signalling
the small cues (dress, posture, vocabulary) that broadcast status

Complete each sentence with a word from the box.

- She spoke with such conviction_ that even sceptics on the board fell quiet.
- For a junior consultant, his poise_ under cross-examination was remarkable.
- The deck was flawless, but what carried the pitch was her warmth_.
- He has the technical chops; what he still lacks is gravitas_.

- Everything about her — the pauses, the eye contact — spoke of self-possession_.
- His answers were technically right, but delivered without any polish_.

Choose the best answer.

- Which pair are near-synonyms?

- (a) gravitas / warmth
- (b) poise / self-possession
- (c) polish / authenticity
- (d) conviction / signalling

Answer key: (b) poise / self-possession

- 'Executive presence' is best described as:

- (a) how loudly you speak in meetings
- (b) the combined effect of gravitas, warmth and communication
- (c) the number of frameworks you can quote
- (d) your seniority on paper

Answer key: (b) the combined effect of gravitas, warmth and communication

- A leader accused of 'over-signalling' probably:

- (a) is too quiet
- (b) relies too much on visible status cues
- (c) has no strategy
- (d) avoids all conflict

Answer key: (b) relies too much on visible status cues

- 'Authenticity' in a corporate context most often means:

- (a) never rehearsing anything
- (b) being consistent and unforced across audiences
- (c) refusing coaching
- (d) speaking in your first language

Answer key: (b) being consistent and unforced across audiences

LISTENING

Coaching Nora — the panel opening

12 min

A coach, Marek, is rehearsing a panel opening with Nora, a founder-CEO. Read the transcript (audio coming soon) and answer the questions.

MAREK (COACH): So — the panel on Thursday. Walk me through the first thirty seconds.

NORA: Right. I walk on, I thank the moderator, I say something warm about the other panellists —

MAREK: Stop. Why?

NORA: Because... you're supposed to?

MAREK: You're supposed to signal you belong there. Thanking the moderator doesn't do that. Thanking the moderator is what a guest does. Are you a guest?

NORA: No. I've keynoted this conference three times.

MAREK: Then walk on like it. What's the first thing you actually want them to notice?

NORA: That I'm not going to waste their time.

MAREK: Good. So what's the sentence?

NORA: ... "I have one thing I'd like to say that I don't think anyone else on this panel will."

MAREK: Now that — that is an opening. Notice what you did. You just used a cleft, and you invited disagreement. Rejectable, memorable. Don't dress it up. Don't apologise for it. Not once in the first ninety seconds do you soften.

Choose the best answer.

- Marek's central objection to Nora's opening is that it:
 - (a) is too long
 - (b) positions her as a guest, not a host
 - (c) is not warm enough
 - (d) sounds rehearsed*Answer key: (b) positions her as a guest, not a host*
- The 'opening sentence' Nora arrives at is effective because it is:
 - (a) polite and safe
 - (b) rejectable and memorable
 - (c) technical and precise
 - (d) modest*Answer key: (b) rejectable and memorable*
- Marek's final piece of advice is essentially:
 - (a) speak louder
 - (b) do not soften your opening
 - (c) smile more
 - (d) shorten the sentence*Answer key: (b) do not soften your opening*
- The grammar structure Marek explicitly flags is:
 - (a) the passive
 - (b) inversion
 - (c) a cleft sentence
 - (d) reported speech*Answer key: (c) a cleft sentence*

Teacher notes

Extension: Role-play the same scene using your own upcoming public moment. Record yourself once as the coach and once as the coachee, then listen back and note what you would change.

AUTHENTIC LISTENING · REAL VOICES

The disappearing lectern — Brené Brown on showing up

Source: Adapted from TED · Brené Brown, 'The Power of Vulnerability' (excerpt for classroom use)
· Transcript excerpt used under fair-dealing for educational commentary. Original talk © TED Conferences LLC.

C1+

□ ≈ 3 min excerpt

In this excerpt from her landmark TED talk, Brené Brown describes the moment before she walked onstage — and what she learned about presence, vulnerability, and the professional urge to armour up. Listen for the pauses, the self-corrections, and the way she withholds the punchline.

Faixa em produção. O player aparece aqui — o áudio será publicado em breve. Enquanto isso, use o script completo abaixo.

1. LISTEN FOR GIST

- 1. What did the event planner hesitate to call Brené Brown, and why?
Answer key: A researcher — she feared the audience would find that label 'boring and irrelevant'.
- 2. What label did the planner choose instead?
Answer key: A storyteller — which Brown initially resisted before reframing it.

2. LISTEN FOR DETAIL

- 1. How does Brown describe her internal reaction to being called a storyteller?
Answer key: The 'academic, insecure part' of her recoiled ('You're going to call me a what?'), and she joked about being called a 'magic pixie'.
- 2. How does she reconcile 'researcher' and 'storyteller'?
Answer key: By reframing stories as 'data with a soul' — her qualitative research is, precisely, collecting stories.
- 3. What does her use of pauses and self-correction ('Let me think about this...', 'I tried to call deep on my courage') signal to the audience?
Answer key: That she is thinking on her feet, not performing — a presence built on honesty rather than polish.

3. GLOSSARY

flyer

a small printed sheet advertising an event

armour up

put on emotional protection before a difficult moment

qualitative researcher

someone who studies meaning and experience rather than numbers

data with a soul

Brown's phrase for stories treated as serious evidence

FULL SCRIPT

So I'll start with this — a year and a half ago, an event planner called me because I was going to do a speaking event. And she called, and she said, 'I'm really struggling with how to write about you on the little flyer.' And I thought, 'Well, what's the struggle?' And she said, 'Well, I saw you speak, and I'm going to call you a researcher, I think, but I'm afraid if I call you a researcher, no one will come, because they'll think you're boring and irrelevant.'

And I was like, 'Okay.' And she said, 'But the thing I liked about your talk is you're a storyteller. So I think what I'll do is just call you a storyteller.' And of course, the academic, insecure part of me was like, 'You're going to call me a what?' And she said, 'I'm going to call you a storyteller.' And I was like, 'Why not magic pixie?'

I was like, 'Let me think about this for a second.' I tried to call deep on my courage. And I thought, you know, I am a storyteller. I'm a qualitative researcher. I collect stories; that's what I do. And maybe stories are just data with a soul.

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- How does 'stories are data with a soul' change what counts as evidence in your industry?
- When have you 'armoured up' before a professional moment — and what did it cost you?
- Would you rather be introduced as the credentialled version of yourself, or the storytelling version? Why?

GRAMMAR

Inversion for emphasis

18 min

Front a negative or restrictive adverbial invert subject and auxiliary.

- Never have I seen a launch this misaligned.
- Not only did they miss the deadline, but they also lost the account.
- Only when the numbers came in did we understand the risk.
- Rarely is a founder given a second chance with the same board.
- So compelling was the case that the vote was unanimous.

Formal register — for speeches, memos, boardrooms and op-eds; use sparingly in email.

Choose the correct option.

- ____ have I seen a leadership team so misaligned on strategy.
(a) Rarely
(b) Only
(c) Not until
(d) Never before
Answer key: (d) Never before
- Not only ____ the launch delayed — the entire go-to-market plan had to be rewritten.
(a) the launch was
(b) was the launch
(c) the launch has been
(d) has been the launch
Answer key: (b) was the launch
- ____ did we realise how much political capital the CEO had spent.
(a) Only then
(b) Then only
(c) Then
(d) It only then
Answer key: (a) Only then
- Little ____ that the memo would leak within the hour.
(a) we suspected
(b) did we suspect
(c) we did suspect
(d) suspected we
Answer key: (b) did we suspect
- Under no circumstances ____ the board be blindsided again.
(a) should
(b) shouldn't
(c) must
(d) will
Answer key: (a) should
- So convincing ____ that even the incumbent CFO changed her vote.
(a) was her case
(b) her case was
(c) her case has been
(d) had been her case
Answer key: (a) was her case

- Rarely ____ such a candid post-mortem from an incoming CEO.
(a) I have heard
(b) have I heard
(c) I heard
(d) heard I
Answer key: (b) have I heard
- No sooner ____ the deal announced than the share price fell 8%.
(a) had been
(b) was
(c) had been the deal
(d) was the deal
Answer key: (d) was the deal

Complete the inverted structure.

- Rewrite: 'We had never seen such a rehearsed candidate.' Never had we seen_ such a rehearsed candidate.
- Rewrite: 'She not only chairs the committee but also owns the P&L.' Not only does she chair_ the committee, but she also owns the P&L.
- Rewrite: 'The room only fell silent when the founder walked in.' Only when the founder walked in did the room fall_ silent.
- Rewrite: 'The evidence was so compelling that no one dissented.' So compelling was the evidence_ that no one dissented.
- Rewrite: 'On no account should the client see this draft.' — keep the inversion, replace 'should' with 'must' On no account must_ the client see this draft.

Discursive practice:

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

Look at the picture and use the grammar you just studied

You are the journalist writing the lead paragraph of tomorrow's story. Describe the scene in 5–6 sentences using at least three inverted structures.

TRY TO USE

Rarely...

Not only... but also...

Only when...

So + adj + was/were...

Under no circumstances...

SAMPLE ANSWER

Rarely does an investor day feel this quiet in the front row. Not only did the CEO announce a full guidance revision, but she also walked the auditorium through her own errors in judgement. So candid was the tone that two long-only funds visibly stopped taking notes and simply listened. Only when the CFO joined her at the podium did the room exhale. Under no circumstances, she said, would the same mistake be repeated. Little did most of us realise how much political capital she had just spent.

VIDEO LESSON · REAL SPEAKERS

Your body language may shape who you are

Source: TED · Amy Cuddy

C1+

□ 21 min

Social psychologist Amy Cuddy argues that nonverbals do not only communicate to others — they change us. Watch her defence of the 'power pose', and note the language she uses to soften a bold claim.

Watch once for gist, then again pausing on the questions below. Use the original on YouTube for subtitles if needed.

1. WATCH FOR GIST

- 1. Cuddy's core claim is that our body language:
Answer key: Changes not only how others see us, but how we see ourselves — it can shift hormone levels and behaviour.
- 2. What is a 'power pose'?
Answer key: An expansive, open posture (arms wide, chest open) held for two minutes to boost testosterone and reduce cortisol.
- 3. What is her recurring imperative near the end?
Answer key: 'Fake it till you become it' — not 'fake it till you make it'.

2. WATCH FOR DETAIL

- 1. How does she describe her own reaction after the car accident?
Answer key: She was told she couldn't finish school — she felt like an impostor and 'small'.
- 2. What was the effect on the low-power posers in the experiment?
Answer key: Testosterone dropped, cortisol rose, risk tolerance decreased.
- 3. Why does she recommend the practice specifically before high-stakes moments?
Answer key: Because the physiological shift is measurable within two minutes and outlasts the pose itself.

3. KEY LANGUAGE

nonverbal

communication without words — posture, gesture, facial expression

impostor (syndrome)

the persistent feeling of not deserving one's role

expansive posture

taking up physical space to signal confidence

fake it till you become it

act it long enough for it to become genuine

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Do you have a 'pre-meeting ritual'? Describe it.
- Where is the line between useful preparation and inauthentic performance?
- In your culture, is 'expansive posture' read as confidence or arrogance?

SPEAKING

Rehearse the first 90 seconds

15 min

ASK THE TEACHER — notes to bring to class

Task 1 — Solo (2 min): Prepare, out loud, the first ninety seconds of one of the following:

- Your opening at a board meeting where you must defend an unpopular decision.
- An internal town hall where you announce a restructuring.
- A pitch to an investor who has already seen fifteen decks this week.

Task 2 — Solo delivery (8 min): Record yourself delivering the piece. Play it back and score yourself on gravitas, warmth, pace and use of pause. Re-record once, aiming to improve the weakest of the four.

Speaking challenge: Repeat your ninety seconds using at least two inverted structures. Same message, sharper delivery.

Teacher notes

Coaching: Watch for over-signalling (name-dropping, jargon) and reward specific pause use. If a student rushes, ask them to redo it with a stopwatch running to 90s exactly.

Record your answer

WRITING

An opening statement

20 min homework

Task (220–260 words): You have been asked to give the opening of your company's annual leadership offsite. Write the first two paragraphs of your speech.

Requirements:

- Use at least three inverted structures for emphasis.
- Include at least four items from the vocabulary set.
- Open without a joke, a statistic, or the word "excited".

Upload to the workbook page. Re-read your draft 24 hours later and mark the two structures you used most effectively.

WRAP-UP

Consolidate before you leave

5 min

Before you close your laptop, complete each prompt out loud or in a note to yourself.

- In one sentence: what is executive presence, really?
- Give one example of inversion you would actually use this week — where, when, why.
- Which item from the vocabulary set will you use in your next email or meeting?
- One habit from the reading you want to stop; one you want to start.
- Rate yourself 1–5 on: gravitas / poise / warmth / signalling. Which is your next investment?

Take-away:

WORKBOOK · HOME PRACTICE

Unit 1A Workbook

Do this after class. Answers are marked for your teacher.

VOCABULARY

Executive presence — review

8 min

- Choose the best synonym for 'gravitas' in a business context.

- (a) cheerfulness
- (b) weighty seriousness
- (c) loud confidence
- (d) technical brilliance

Answer key: (b) weighty seriousness

- 'Signalling' most closely refers to:

- (a) formal communication
- (b) cues that broadcast status
- (c) internal reports
- (d) quarterly guidance

Answer key: (b) cues that broadcast status

- A candidate 'lacking polish' likely:

- (a) comes across as under-rehearsed and rough
- (b) is dishonest
- (c) has no experience
- (d) speaks too quietly

Answer key: (a) comes across as under-rehearsed and rough

- 'Self-possession' most naturally collocates with:

- (a) under pressure
- (b) on paper
- (c) over time
- (d) of course

Answer key: (a) under pressure

- There was a rare poise_ in the way she answered the hostile question — she paused, smiled, then answered.
- The whole panel had technical depth; none of them had gravitas_.
- Her signalling_ at the town hall — walking into the room a minute early — did more than any slide.
- What people remember about him is not the numbers; it's the warmth_.
- Under an aggressive line of questioning, his self-possession_ was almost unnatural.

GRAMMAR

Inversion — review

12 min

- Not only ____ the report late — it was also inaccurate.

- (a) was
- (b) the report was
- (c) did
- (d) the report

Answer key: (a) was

- Rarely ____ such a candid CFO on a first earnings call.
 - (a) I have seen
 - (b) have I seen
 - (c) I saw
 - (d) did I saw*Answer key: (b) have I seen*
- Only after the audit ____ the scale of the problem.
 - (a) we understood
 - (b) did we understand
 - (c) we did understand
 - (d) understood we*Answer key: (b) did we understand*
- So ____ was her argument that the board voted in five minutes.
 - (a) compelling
 - (b) much compelling
 - (c) very compelling
 - (d) most compelling*Answer key: (a) compelling*
- Under no circumstances ____ this file to be shared externally.
 - (a) is
 - (b) does
 - (c) should be allowed
 - (d) should*Answer key: (a) is*
- No sooner ____ the announcement made than the share price moved.
 - (a) was
 - (b) did
 - (c) had been
 - (d) has been*Answer key: (a) was*
- Little ____ how public the leak would become.
 - (a) did she know
 - (b) she knew
 - (c) knew she
 - (d) did she knew*Answer key: (a) did she know*

Rewrite each sentence beginning as shown.

- Rewrite with inversion: 'We had never faced a crisis of this scale.' Never had we faced_ a crisis of this scale.
- Rewrite: 'The truth only came out at the end of the year.' Only at the end of the year did the truth come_ out.
- Rewrite: 'She had barely finished speaking when the offer arrived.' Barely had she finished_ speaking when the offer arrived.
- Rewrite: 'Their pitch was so polished that we assumed they had rehearsed for weeks.' So polished was their pitch_ that we assumed they had rehearsed for weeks.
- Rewrite: 'You must under no circumstances forward this email.' Under no circumstances must you forward_ this email.

WRITING

Board-note opening

20 min

Task (140–180 words): You must open the first page of a note to the board recommending a difficult decision (redundancies, exit of a market, ending a partnership). Write two paragraphs.

- Use at least two inverted structures.
- Include gravitas, self-possession or signalling — used naturally.
- Do not use the words unfortunately, excited or painful.

Teacher notes

Marking focus: emphasis (is the inversion earning its keep?), register (formal, not stiff), and honesty of the framing.
