



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 2 · B2B

Reaching consensus

Theme · Meetings & Decisions

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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?

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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
