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**B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH**

**UNIT 6 · B1·6B**

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# Speaking up when it matters

*Theme · Meetings basics*

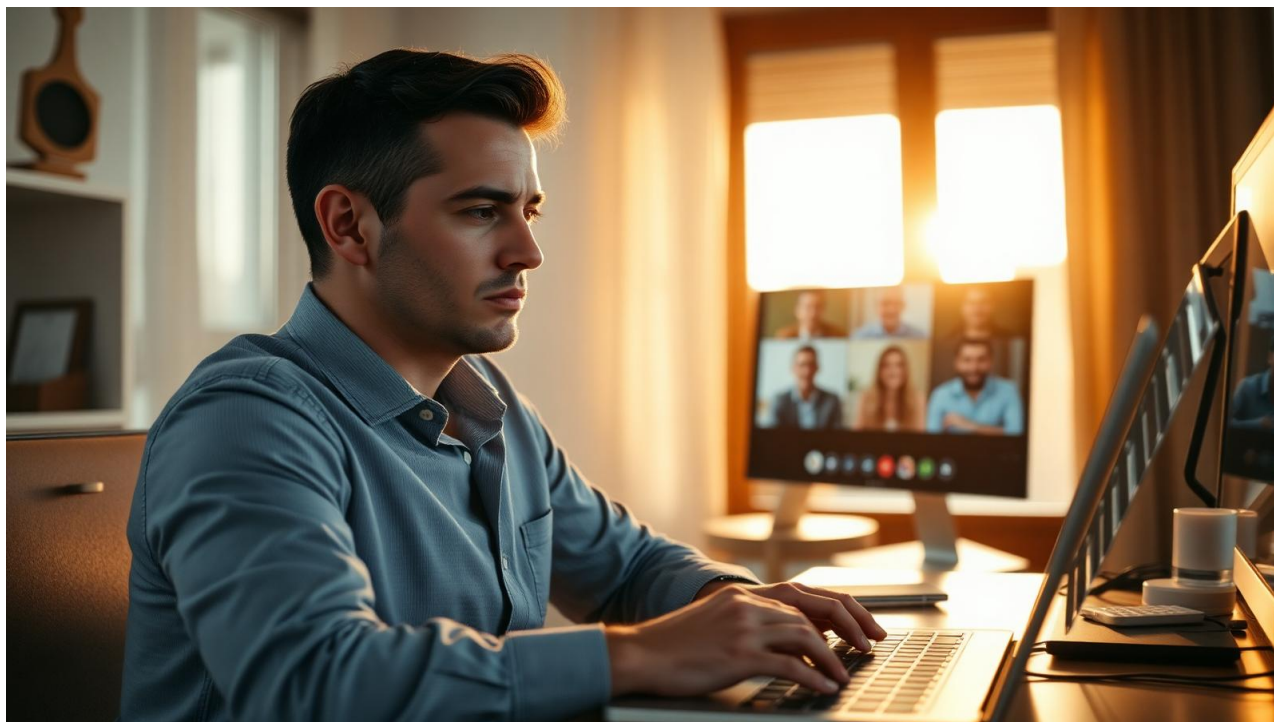


Unit 6 · B1·6B

# Speaking up when it matters

Theme: Meetings basics

B1 · Business English



## Learning objectives

- Interrupt, disagree and clarify politely in a meeting.
- Give advice using should, ought to, had better and don't have to.
- Write a short piece of workplace advice (2–3 sentences) using modals.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



## Class Book

### Warm-up · Speak-up temperature check

Rate each situation 1 (super easy) to 5 (I freeze). Share your highest score and your lowest — one sentence each.

Disagreeing with your manager in front of the team.

Interrupting a colleague who's been speaking for 5 minutes.

Asking 'sorry, could you say that again?' on a video call.

Correcting a factual mistake in someone's slide.

Saying 'I don't know' out loud in a senior meeting.

### Lead-in: agony aunt mailbox

Four short letters have arrived in the class advice column. Read them all, then choose ONE to answer. Write 2–3 sentences of advice using modals (should, ought to, must, had better, don't have to...). We'll read the best answers aloud.

**kind:** mailbox

1. **label:** LETTER 1 · **text:** My team keeps adding me to evening calls because of the time zone. I'm exhausted and resentful, but I'm scared to say no. What should I do? · **signature:** — Tired in Tokyo

2. **label:** LETTER 2 · **text:** My manager gives me feedback in front of the whole team. Some of it is fair — but doing it publicly makes me shut down. I've never told him it bothers me. Is that on me? · **signature:** — Silent in São Paulo

3. **label:** LETTER 3 · **text:** In every meeting there's one person who talks over me. I've tried waiting for a gap. There isn't one. I'm starting to just email my ideas afterwards, but nobody remembers who suggested what. · **signature:** — Talked-over in Toronto

4. **label:** LETTER 4 · **text:** I've realised I actually disagree with a decision my team made last week. The meeting is closed and everyone has moved on. Do I say something now, or let it go? · **signature:** — Late in Lisbon

1. **for:** LETTER 1 · **model:** You shouldn't accept every evening call — that's not sustainable. You ought to ask for a written summary instead, or rotate the late slot with a colleague. You don't have to justify sleeping.

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2. **for:** LETTER 2 · **model:** Public feedback is his mistake, not yours — but he can't fix what you don't name. You should ask for a 10-minute 1-to-1 and say, calmly, that private feedback works better for you. You mustn't stay silent — silence looks like agreement.

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3. **for:** LETTER 3 · **model:** You had better raise it in the meeting itself — one clear line: 'Sorry, I hadn't finished — can I finish that thought?' If it keeps happening, you should flag it to the chair privately, not by email.

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4. **for:** LETTER 4 · **model:** You should say something — but frame it as a question, not a reversal. 'Quick check on the option-B decision — I've been thinking, and I have one concern. Can I share it?' You don't have to reopen the whole debate to raise one risk.

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**followUp:** Whose problem is closest to something you have at work? Explain in one sentence.

### Reading · Three ways to disagree without being 'that person'

Disagreeing in a meeting is harder than it looks. Say it too softly and nobody hears you; say it too hard and you become 'that person'. There are three moves that work.

Move one: agree with the goal, disagree with the plan. 'I want the same outcome — I'm just worried the timeline is too tight.' You've made it about the work, not about the person.

Move two: ask before you argue. 'Can I check one thing before we lock this in?' A question buys you 30 seconds. In 30 seconds you can raise a risk without triggering a defence.

Move three: put your disagreement on the record — in writing, calmly, within 24 hours. 'Just to capture my one concern from today's meeting...' If it turns out you were right, everyone remembers. If not, nobody minds — you flagged it professionally.

1. According to the text, what's the problem with disagreeing too softly?

- (A) Nobody hears you
- (B) You look weak
- (C) You look confused

2. What is 'agree with the goal, disagree with the plan'?

- (A) A trick
- (B) A way to make it about the work, not the person
- (C) A management theory

3. Why put your disagreement in writing within 24 hours?

- (A) To create conflict
- (B) So there's a professional record if you turn out to be right
- (C) To involve HR

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## Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to the meaning.

**raise a risk** — point out something that could go wrong

**lock (something) in** — confirm a decision so it can't change

**put on the record** — note officially, usually in writing

**trigger a defence** — make the other person react protectively

## True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text, choose the correct option.

1. Being 'that person' is a compliment.  
(A) True  
(B) False  
(C) Not Given
2. A short question can buy you time to raise a concern.  
(A) True  
(B) False  
(C) Not Given
3. You should always write your disagreement within the meeting itself.  
(A) True  
(B) False  
(C) Not Given
4. The author gives four moves in total.  
(A) True  
(B) False  
(C) Not Given
5. Flagging a risk in writing is called 'professional'.  
(A) True  
(B) False  
(C) Not Given

## React to the text

Discuss briefly.

1. Which of the three moves do you already do — and which one is new to you?

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2. Is there a fourth move you'd add?

### Scan for meaning

*Find the phrase in the text.*

1. point out something that could go wrong

2. confirm a decision

3. make someone react protectively

4. note officially in writing

### Vocabulary · Speaking up politely

**to interrupt (politely)** — to speak while another is speaking, but respectfully

**to jump in** — informal way to interrupt briefly

**to push back** — to disagree with a plan or a request

**to clarify** — to ask for something to be made clearer

**to paraphrase** — to repeat something in your own words

**to signal (a concern)** — to flag something discreetly before it becomes a friction point

**"Sorry to jump in, but..."** — polite interruption opener

**"Just to check my understanding..."** — soft way to ask for clarification

**"Can I add one thing?"** — asking for a small speaking turn

**"I see it slightly differently."** — polite disagreement

**"Can I raise one concern before we close?"** — flagging a risk before a decision is locked in

**"Just to be clear on next steps..."** — closing summary opener

### practice

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

1. 'Sorry to \_\_\_\_, but we haven't confirmed the deadline yet.'

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2. 'Just to \_\_\_\_ my understanding — Marc owns the deliverable by Friday, right?'

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3. 'Can I \_\_\_\_ one concern before we close?'

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4. 'I \_\_\_\_ it slightly differently — can I share why?'

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5. 'Just to be \_\_\_\_ on next steps — Ana sends the summary tonight.'

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6. 'Can you \_\_\_\_ what you mean by "soon"?'

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### Collocations · softening verbs

*Match the verb with the noun/phrase.*

**raise** — a concern / a risk

**push** — back (on a decision)

**seek** — clarification

**flag** — an issue

**table** — a suggestion

**voice** — an opinion

### Odd one out

*Which word does NOT belong?*

1. clarify · paraphrase · summarise · postpone

(A) clarify

(B) paraphrase

(C) summarise

(D) postpone

2. concern · risk · issue · agenda

(A) concern

(B) risk

(C) issue

(D) agenda

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3. polite · calm · respectful · abrupt

(A) polite

(B) calm

(C) respectful

(D) abrupt

### Word building · adjective ↔ noun

*Complete the pair.*

1. polite → \_\_\_\_

2. clear → \_\_\_\_

3. respectful → \_\_\_\_

4. confident → \_\_\_\_

5. honest → \_\_\_\_



### Grammar · should / ought to / had better · don't have to

1. **should** → **general advice (soft)** — • You should send a short summary after the meeting.

2. **ought to** → **slightly more formal 'should'** — • You ought to raise this with your manager, not with HR first.

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**3. had better** → **strong warning about a specific situation** — • You'd better mention that risk today — it may be too late tomorrow. • ■■■ Not for general advice. Only for 'if you don't, there's a real consequence'.

**4. don't have to** → **it's optional (NOT forbidden)** — • You don't have to speak in every meeting. • Compare: You mustn't share the slides externally. (forbidden)

**5. Softeners that pair well with modals** — • I think you should ... • Maybe you ought to ... • Honestly, you'd better ... • You really don't have to ...

### Exercise A — pick the right modal

*Choose should, ought to, had better or don't have to.*

1. General advice: you \_\_\_\_ read the minutes even when you attended.

2. Optional: you \_\_\_\_ join the Friday drinks — it's genuinely optional.

3. Real risk if you don't: you \_\_\_\_ tell your boss BEFORE she sees the client email.

4. Formal advice to a peer: you \_\_\_\_ copy Legal on that reply.

5. Reassurance: you \_\_\_\_ apologise — it wasn't your mistake.

6. Warning: we \_\_\_\_ leave now or we'll miss the whole first session.

### Exercise B — find and fix the mistake

*Each sentence has ONE mistake.*

1. You had better to tell her before Monday.

2. You don't have not to speak.

3. You ought send the summary today.

4. Maybe you should to raise it in the meeting.

### Exercise C — advice with softeners

*Rewrite each blunt sentence into polite advice using a softener + modal.*

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1. 'Send it.'

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2. 'Tell your boss now.'

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3. 'Don't reply while angry.'

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4. 'Copy HR.'

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### Exercise D — answer the mailbox

Write a 2–3 sentence reply to *ONE* letter from the lead-in, using *AT LEAST* two of: *should, ought to, had better, don't have to, mustn't*.

1. Reply to Tired in Tokyo:

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2. Reply to Silent in São Paulo:

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### Exercise E — your workplace advice column

Write *ONE* piece of real advice you'd give a colleague this month. Use two modals. Max 3 sentences.

1. Your advice:

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### Exercise F — softeners in action

Complete each phrase.

1. Softener + strong warning: 'Honestly, you'd \_\_\_\_ tell them before Monday.'

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2. Softener + advice: 'I \_\_\_\_ you should copy Legal on this.'

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3. Softener + optional: 'You really \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ come in tomorrow.'

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4. Softener + formal advice: '\_\_\_\_, maybe you \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ raise it with your director first.'

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## Listening · Three colleagues, one difficult meeting

Three colleagues describe how they handled the *SAME* difficult meeting: a proposal was pushed through without proper discussion. Listen for who spoke up, who stayed quiet, and who put their disagreement 'on the record' later.

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**pre**

Have you ever regretted staying quiet in a meeting? What happened?

Have you ever regretted speaking up? What happened?

**gist**

1. What was the meeting about?

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2. Which voice raised a concern in the meeting itself?

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3. Which voice stayed silent but sent an email within 24 hours?

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**detail**

1. What was Voice A's regret?

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2. What phrase did Voice B use to raise the concern without derailing the meeting?

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3. What did Voice C's email include?

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**Third listen — read between the lines**

*Answer from what is IMPLIED.*

1. Who handled it best — Voice B in the meeting, or Voice C in writing?

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2. Why does Voice A regret it so much?

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**Useful language from the audio**

*Match each phrase to what it does.*

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**"Can I raise one concern before we close?"** — polite risk-flag inside the meeting

**"Just to put my one concern on the record..."** — professional written follow-up

**"Happy to be wrong — just wanted this on the record."** — leaving room to disagree without escalating

**"What happens to the two clients who asked for monthly?"** — one specific, unemotional question

**"Now it just looks like I agreed."** — regret about silence in a meeting

**Voice A:** Honestly? I sat there. Three minutes for questions, everyone looked at their laptop, and I stayed quiet too. It's been bothering me all week — I actually disagreed. And now, because I said nothing and I wrote nothing, it just looks like I agreed. That's on me.

**Voice B:** I asked one question. Just one. 'Can I raise one concern before we close? What happens to the two clients who explicitly asked for monthly reviews?' That's it. It didn't derail the meeting. It just meant that when I left the room, everyone knew there was one open question — with my name next to it.

**Voice C:** I didn't speak in the meeting — I don't process fast enough live. But I sent an email within 24 hours. One paragraph. One specific risk, one proposed mitigation, and I ended with 'happy to be wrong — just wanted this on the record.' Three weeks later, one of the two clients did leave. My email was already there. That mattered.

#### Fourth listen — fill the gaps

*Complete the exact phrases from the audio.*

1. Now it just looks like I \_\_\_\_.

2. Can I \_\_\_\_ one \_\_\_\_ before we close?

3. Just to put my one concern on the \_\_\_\_.

4. Happy to be \_\_\_\_ — just wanted this on the record.

#### Speaking · The 60-second speak-up

Choose **ONE** real (or realistic) meeting moment where you should have spoken up but didn't. Prepare a 60-second oral 'what I should have said' — the polite, clear version. Use **AT LEAST** one softener + modal ('I think you should...', 'Maybe you ought to...', 'Honestly, you'd better...').

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**Scene:** A decision made without you

A: You: raise the concern AFTER the meeting, in a 1-to-1. Use 'ought to' + a softener.

B: You: the decision-maker. React — defend, listen, or reopen.

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**Scene:** A public feedback moment

A: You: ask calmly for private feedback next time. Use 'I think you should...'.  
B: You: the manager. React — apologise, negotiate, or push back.

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**Scene:** A dominator in a stand-up

A: You: interrupt politely. Use 'Sorry to jump in...'.  
B: You: the dominator. React — say sorry, negotiate time, or ignore.

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## Class discussion

*Discuss briefly.*

In your culture, is disagreeing in public normal, or a big deal?

Is silence in a meeting the same as agreement? Should it be?

Which is harder: raising a concern LIVE or writing it up within 24 hours?

## Role-play · the 24-hour email

*Student A had a meeting yesterday where a decision was rushed through. Student B is the manager. Student A writes and delivers (out loud) a 5-line 'just to put on the record' message. Student B has to respond in one calm sentence.*

**Scene:** A rushed hiring decision

A: Student A: raise ONE concern about the candidate — with a suggested mitigation.

B: Student B: the hiring manager. React — reopen, negotiate, or defend.

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**Scene:** A budget cut you weren't consulted on

A: Student A: flag ONE cut that affects a real project.

B: Student B: the finance lead. React — negotiate, explain, or reverse.

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## Workbook — home practice



### 1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

**Word bank:** interrupt · clarify · concern · record · paraphrase · push back

1. Can you \_\_\_\_ what you mean by 'soon'?

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2. Sorry to \_\_\_\_ — quick question on that number.

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3. Can I raise one \_\_\_\_ before we close?

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4. Just to put my one concern on the \_\_\_\_...

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5. Let me \_\_\_\_ that to check I understood: you want the deck by Wednesday, not Thursday.

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6. I want to \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ on the timeline — it's tighter than it looks.

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### 2. should / ought to / had better / don't have to

Choose the best modal for the meaning.

1. (general advice) You \_\_\_\_ read the minutes even when you attended.

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2. (optional) You \_\_\_\_ join the Friday drinks — it's genuinely optional.

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3. (real consequence if you don't) You \_\_\_\_ tell your boss BEFORE she sees the client email.

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4. (formal advice to a peer) You \_\_\_\_ copy Legal on that reply.

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5. (reassurance) You \_\_\_\_ apologise — it wasn't your mistake.

---

6. (warning) We \_\_\_\_ leave now or we'll miss the whole first session.

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### 3. Polite or blunt?

*For each pair, choose the version that will land better in a professional meeting.*

1. Disagreeing:

(A) You're wrong.

(B) I see it slightly differently — can I share why?

2. Clarifying:

(A) What?

(B) Just to check my understanding — you mean by Friday?

3. Interrupting:

(A) Stop.

(B) Sorry to jump in, but quick question.

4. Raising a concern:

(A) This is a bad idea.

(B) Can I raise one concern before we close?

### 4. Find and fix the mistake

*Each sentence has ONE mistake.*

1. You had better to tell her before Monday.

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2. You don't have not to speak.

---

3. You ought send the summary today.

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4. Maybe you should to raise it in the meeting.

## 5. Listening — three colleagues after a rushed decision

Three colleagues talk about the same meeting where a proposal was pushed through without proper discussion. Decide who handled it well — and who didn't.

1. Which colleague RAISED the concern in the meeting?

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2. Which one PUT IT ON THE RECORD in writing within 24 hours?

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3. Which one REGRETS staying silent?

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**Voice A:** Honestly, I sat there. I disagreed, but I said nothing and I wrote nothing. Now it just looks like I agreed. That's on me.

**Voice B:** I asked one question. 'Can I raise one concern before we close? What happens to the two clients who asked for monthly?' It didn't derail anything — but my name was on the concern.

**Voice C:** I don't process fast enough live. I sent one paragraph within 24 hours: one risk, one mitigation, 'happy to be wrong — just wanted this on the record'. Three weeks later, one of the two clients left. That email mattered.

## 6. Writing — your own mailbox reply

Choose **ONE** letter from the class mailbox (lead-in) that you did **NOT** answer in class. Write a 3-sentence reply. Use **AT LEAST** two modals from this lesson (should, ought to, had better, don't have to, mustn't). Max 60 words.

## 7. Case study reflection

Look ahead to Case Study 6. Answer briefly.

1. In your team, who is most likely to stay silent when they disagree — and why?

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2. What **ONE** rule would you introduce next Monday to make speaking up easier?

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## Answer key — Class Book

### Reading · Three ways to disagree without being 'that person'

1. (A) Nobody hears you
2. (B) A way to make it about the work, not the person
3. (B) So there's a professional record if you turn out to be right
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (B) False
4. (B) False
5. (A) True
1. Model: I do 'ask before you argue' naturally. The 24-hour written-note move is new — I usually just let it go.
2. Model: name the risk with a number. 'I'm 70% worried about the timeline.' A number lands harder than 'I'm worried'.
1. raise a risk
2. lock (something) in
3. trigger a defence
4. put on the record

### Vocabulary · Speaking up politely

1. jump in
2. check
3. raise
4. see
5. clear
6. clarify
1. (D) postpone
2. (D) agenda
3. (D) abrupt
1. politeness
2. clarity
3. respect
4. confidence
5. honesty

### Grammar · should / ought to / had better · don't have to

1. should / ought to
2. don't have to
3. had better
4. ought to
5. don't have to
6. 'd better
1. You had better tell her before Monday.
2. You don't have to speak.
3. You ought to send the summary today.
4. Maybe you should raise it in the meeting.
1. Model: 'I think you should send it — the sooner the better.'
2. Model: 'Honestly, you'd better tell your boss now — before someone else does.'
3. Model: 'Maybe you shouldn't reply right now — sleep on it.'
4. Model: 'You ought to copy HR on this — just to have it on the record.'
1. Model: 'You shouldn't accept evening calls as the default. You ought to ask for a written summary or rotate the slot with a colleague. You don't have to justify sleeping.'
2. Model: 'You had better raise it in a private 1-to-1 — soon. You shouldn't tolerate public feedback if it makes you shut down. You mustn't assume he knows how it lands.'
1. Model: 'You should stop replying to emails after 8 p.m. — you're training people to expect it. You don't have to be always-on to be senior.'

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1. better
2. think
3. don't have to
4. Actually / ought to

### Listening · Three colleagues, one difficult meeting

1. A proposal to move all client reviews from monthly to quarterly — presented as 'basically decided' with 3 minutes for questions.
2. Voice B — asked one clear question ('what happens to the two clients who explicitly asked for monthly?').
3. Voice C — sent a calm one-paragraph email 'just to put my one concern on the record'.
  1. Not speaking up and not writing anything down — 'now it just looks like I agreed'.
  2. 'Can I raise one concern before we close?'
3. One specific risk, ONE proposed mitigation, and 'happy to be wrong — just wanted this on the record'.
  1. Both worked. Voice B raised the concern live; Voice C created a paper trail. The worst outcome was Voice A's silence with no follow-up.
  2. Because silence in a meeting looks like agreement — and there's no record to say otherwise.
    1. agreed
    2. raise / concern
    3. record
    4. wrong

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## Answer key — Workbook

### 1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. clarify
2. interrupt
3. concern
4. record
5. paraphrase
6. push back

### 2. should / ought to / had better / don't have to

1. should / ought to
2. don't have to
3. had better
4. ought to
5. don't have to
6. 'd better

### 3. Polite or blunt?

1. (B) I see it slightly differently — can I share why?
2. (B) Just to check my understanding — you mean by Friday?
3. (B) Sorry to jump in, but quick question.
4. (B) Can I raise one concern before we close?

### 4. Find and fix the mistake

1. You had better tell her before Monday.
2. You don't have to speak.
3. You ought to send the summary today.
4. Maybe you should raise it in the meeting.

### 5. Listening — three colleagues after a rushed decision

1. Voice B — asked one clear, specific question before the room closed the topic.
2. Voice C — sent a calm one-paragraph email with one risk and one mitigation.
3. Voice A — 'now it just looks like I agreed'.

### 7. Case study reflection

1. Model: the newest hires. They still think 'raising a concern' will make them look negative. They're wrong, but nobody has told them yet.
2. Model: at every meeting close, the chair has to ask: 'anyone got one concern before we close?' — five seconds of silence, then move on.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class