



**APEX ENGLISH · A2 BUSINESS**

# Unit A2-9B

## A big project

My work story — the project you can point at

# A big project

My work story — the project you can point at · A2+ · 55–65 min · Business English



*“A project isn't done when it ships. It's done when someone else can point at what changed.”*

— Rule of the finished thing

## Objectives

- Describe a completed project with a professional structure: scope → team → timeline → outcome → lesson.
- Use past simple accurately with time markers (ago, in, on, at, from...to, by) to give a project a clean shape.
- Distinguish between what the project delivered (output) and what it changed (outcome / impact).
- Handle the follow-up question every interviewer asks: 'And what would you do differently now?'

## Class Book

### Warm-up · The project reflex

Solo · about you · 4 min

*Think through these three questions in your head. No writing needed.*

**Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class**

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- Name the last work project you finished. Don't describe it yet — just name it in five words or fewer.
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- How would you know, from the outside, that the project actually worked? What would be different?
- 
- 'The hardest thing about that project was...' — finish the sentence. Be honest.
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## Lead-in · The retrospective board

Brainstorm · post-project reflection · 8 min

*Imagine your last completed project is on a whiteboard, split into four columns: Went well · Went wrong · Learned · Try next time. For each of the prompts below, jot down ONE specific answer for a project you actually worked on. Aim for concrete facts — a number, a name, a moment — not adjectives like 'good' or 'difficult'.*

**Follow-up:** Notice the pattern: a professional project story lives in concrete details — one decision, one number, one stakeholder — not in adjectives.

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## Reading · The Barcelona office that almost didn't open

10 min

In February last year, my company decided to open its first office abroad — a small satellite in Barcelona. On paper, the project was simple: rent 180 square metres of workspace, hire four local staff, connect the systems, run a launch event, and be operational by the first Monday of September. Seven months, a team of eight people, and a budget of forty thousand euros. On a spreadsheet, it looked almost boring.

The first four months went smoothly. We signed the lease in March, ran the recruitment in April, and by the end of May we had our four local colleagues on payroll and our IT systems talking to Lisbon. We celebrated our first milestone with a small dinner. We were, on paper, ahead of schedule.

In June, the problem we hadn't planned for arrived. Two of our new hires resigned within eight days of each other — one because his partner got a job in Madrid, one because he found a better offer at a Barcelona start-up. Suddenly we were four weeks from launch, missing half our local team, and watching the recruitment market close for the summer holidays. Our project plan didn't have a page for that.

What saved us was not a heroic rescue. It was the decision, quite early in July, to stop pretending the launch date was fixed. We told our CEO, we told our future clients, and we told the two remaining local staff. We moved the launch by five weeks — from the first Monday of September to the second Monday of October. We spent an extra six thousand euros on recruitment and a small welcome bonus for the two who stayed. We didn't spin it. We said, in plain language: we underestimated the local market and we adjusted.

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The office opened on 12 October with a full team of four. Two years later, it's still open, still profitable, and still staffed by three of the four people we hired. The project delivered on paper: a working office, in budget give or take fifteen percent, only five weeks late. What it delivered in reality was more useful. It taught us that a professional project isn't the one that hits the original date — it's the one that adjusts the date honestly, in public, before the wheels come off.

### Comprehension check

1. The main challenge of the project was...

- ☐ A. The lease was too expensive
- ☐ B. Two new hires resigned four weeks before launch and the summer recruitment market was closing
- ☐ C. The IT systems didn't connect to Lisbon

2. The 'rescue' of the project was best described as...

- ☐ A. A heroic, last-minute effort
- ☐ B. The early decision to publicly move the launch date and adjust the plan
- ☐ C. Hiring the two staff back at a higher salary

3. The narrator's main argument in the last paragraph is that...

- ☐ A. Projects that finish on the original date are always the best
- ☐ B. A good project is one that adjusts its plan honestly and in public when reality changes
- ☐ C. Barcelona is a difficult city to hire in

4. The 'output' of the project (what was delivered) is...

- ☐ A. A working Barcelona office, roughly on budget, five weeks late
- ☐ B. A better recruitment strategy
- ☐ C. A closer relationship with the CEO

### True, False or Not Given?

*Choose based on the text only.*

1. The project came in under budget.

- ☐ A. True
- ☐ B. False
- ☐ C. Not Given

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2. Three of the four originally hired staff are still with the company two years later.

- ☐ A. True
- ☐ B. False
- ☐ C. Not Given

3. The CEO tried to prevent the launch from being delayed.

- ☐ A. True
- ☐ B. False
- ☐ C. Not Given

### About the text — think and write

Answer briefly. The final item is a discursive task — write it out in full paragraph form.

1. The text says: 'a professional project isn't the one that hits the original date — it's the one that adjusts the date honestly, in public, before the wheels come off.' What's the difference between adjusting a date and 'spinning' it?

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2. In your own workplace, which is harder — moving a deadline publicly, or quietly missing it? Why?

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3. **\*\*Discursive task (100–130 words).\*\*** Think of one project you were involved in that did NOT hit its original deadline. In your own words, describe (a) the original plan and the moment reality diverged from it, (b) what your team actually did about the divergence, and (c) whether, looking back, you would call that project a success or a failure — and why. Use past simple + at least three time markers ('in [month]', 'by [date]', 'X weeks later', 'from...to').

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## Vocabulary · Project language that survives an interview

10 min

### Roles

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| Term                           | Meaning                                                                            |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scope                          | what is (and isn't) included in the project — the boundary                         |
| milestone                      | a named checkpoint with a date attached; not just 'progress' in general            |
| deliverable                    | the concrete thing you hand over — a document, a launch, a feature                 |
| stakeholder                    | anyone whose life or work is affected by the project's outcome                     |
| on-time / on-budget / in-scope | the three classic dimensions of project success — usually you get two out of three |
| outcome vs output              | output = what you built; outcome = what changed because of it                      |

### Smalltalk

| Term                               | Meaning                                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| kick off                           | start a project formally with a first meeting                 |
| wrap up                            | close a project — final deliverables, handover, retrospective |
| hit a milestone                    | reach a named checkpoint on the plan                          |
| slip a deadline                    | miss a date — polite phrasing for late                        |
| run over budget                    | spend more than planned                                       |
| in the end / at the end of the day | used to introduce the honest final assessment                 |

### Practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word or phrase from the lists above.

1. The \_\_\_ was clear from day one: launch a satellite office in Barcelona, no additional markets.
2. Our first \_\_\_ was signing the lease in March — that's when the project became real.
3. The final \_\_\_ was a working office with four staff on payroll and IT integrated with Lisbon.
4. The two most important \_\_\_ were the CEO and the future local team — everybody else could wait.

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5. We were \_\_\_ but not \_\_\_, and definitely not \_\_\_ — five weeks late.

6. The \_\_\_ was a physical office. The \_\_\_ was that Iberia went from one country to two on our client map.

## Collocations · verb + noun (project life)

Match each verb with the correct noun / phrase.

| Term     | Meaning                         |
|----------|---------------------------------|
| kick off | the project                     |
| scope    | the work / a piece of work      |
| hit      | a milestone                     |
| slip     | a deadline                      |
| run      | over budget                     |
| wrap up  | the retrospective / the project |

## Odd one out — which register is different?

One option is far too casual (or vague) for a project stakeholder update.

1. Which sentence belongs in a written status update to a senior stakeholder?

- ☐ A. 'Yeah so basically the launch is going to slide a bit.'
- ☐ B. 'We're formally moving the launch from 4 September to 12 October; the reason and the new plan are below.'
- ☐ C. 'Fingers crossed we'll be roughly on track by autumn.'

2. Which is the strongest way to describe project success in an interview?

- ☐ A. 'It went really well, everyone was happy.'
- ☐ B. 'We delivered the office in-scope and only five weeks late; two years on, it's still profitable and staffed by three of the four original hires.'
- ☐ C. 'It was fine.'

## Grammar · past simple + time markers for project timelines

14 min

### 1. Past simple — the tense that gives a project its shape

Use for a completed action at a defined moment in the past.

- We kicked off the project in February.
- The office opened on 12 October.

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- Questions: 'How long did the project take?', 'When did you kick off?', 'Did you hit every milestone?'

## 2. Time markers — the coordinates of a project timeline

in + month / year → 'in February', 'in 2023'

on + date / day → 'on 12 October', 'on Monday'

at + clock time → 'at 09:00'

ago (after the amount) → 'two years ago'

from ... to ... → 'from February to September'

by + deadline → 'by the end of June'

within + duration → 'within three weeks' (limit)

after + duration → 'after seven months' (elapsed)

## 3. Past simple vs past continuous — event vs background

Past simple = the events on the timeline. Past continuous = what was happening in the background around a specific moment.

- When two of our new hires resigned, we were already running the launch checklist. (event + background)
- While we were finalising the lease, HR was still interviewing candidates. (two backgrounds in parallel)

## 4. 'Ago' vs 'in' vs 'for' — the three most-mistaken time markers in project stories

ago = 'X time before now' (counted back from today). □ 'two years ago' □ 'ago two years'

in + year/month = a fixed point on the calendar. □ 'in 2023' □ 'in two years ago'

for = duration. □ 'The project lasted for seven months.' □ 'The project lasted during seven months.'

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## Exercise A — Complete with the correct time marker

Choose from: *in · on · at · ago · from...to · by · within · after · for.*

1. We kicked off the project \_\_\_ February and closed it \_\_\_ September \_\_\_ the same year.

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2. The launch event was \_\_\_ 12 October \_\_\_ 19:00 sharp.

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3. Two of our new hires resigned \_\_\_ eight days of each other.

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4. We opened the office \_\_\_ five weeks late — but \_\_\_ seven months from the original kick-off.

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5. The lease was signed two years \_\_\_ tomorrow — the anniversary is this week.

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## Exercise B — Rewrite so the two tenses tell the timeline properly

Combine each pair into ONE sentence using past simple + past continuous (or two past continuous). Keep the timeline clear.

1. The two hires resigned. + We were running the launch checklist.

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2. We were finalising the lease. + HR was interviewing candidates.

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3. The CEO called. + I was writing the revised project plan.

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4. We announced the new launch date. + The client was on holiday.

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## Exercise C — Turn a project bullet into an interview answer

*Rewrite each dry bullet as a 1–2 sentence spoken answer using past simple + one clear time marker + one specific number.*

**1.** Bullet: 'Opened Barcelona office, 5 weeks late, on-scope, +15% over budget.' → Spoken:

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**2.** Bullet: 'Led 8-person cross-border team, Feb-Sep, €40k budget.' → Spoken:

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**3.** Bullet: 'Retrospective: introduced 2-hour check-in rule.' → Spoken:

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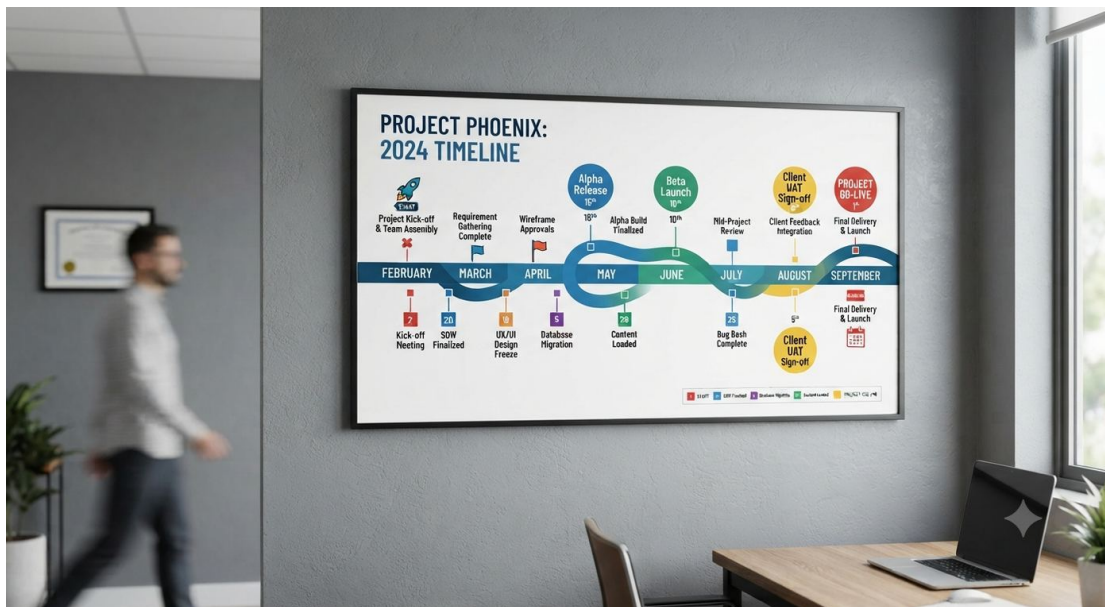
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## Exercise D — Discursive: a 100-word project retrospective paragraph

Write a short retrospective paragraph (about 100 words) about one project you worked on. Use AT LEAST four past-simple verbs, THREE different time markers, and the phrases 'in-scope', 'on-budget' and 'outcome'.

1. Your paragraph starts with: 'We kicked off the project in...'

### Describe the picture



Look at the timeline. In 6–8 sentences, tell the story of the project. Use past simple for events on the timeline, past continuous for what was happening 'around' those events, and AT LEAST three of these time markers: from...to, on, in, by, ago, after, within.

Target language: The project kicked off in... · By [month] we had already... · While the design team was ..., engineering was ... · On [date] we hit ... · The project ran from ... to ... · After [duration] we finally ...

## Listening · A project manager gives a 90-second wrap-up to the leadership team

10 min

A project manager (Voice A, female) gives the wrap-up briefing to the leadership team the week after go-live. One voice — this is a solo briefing, not a Q&A.

### Before you listen

- In a good project wrap-up, in what order do you expect: scope, timeline, budget, biggest surprise, outcome, one thing to do differently next time?
- Which of those does an inexperienced project manager usually skip — and why?

### Gist

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1. Who is the audience of this briefing?

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2. What is the speaker's overall stance?

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## Detail

1. How long did the project run and how many people were in the team?

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2. By what percentage did the project run over budget, and what was the main reason?

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3. What is the one specific process change she's proposing coming out of the retrospective?

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## Listen and complete

*Complete with the exact words the speaker uses.*

1. 'The project ran \_\_\_\_ this year, seven months in total.'

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2. 'On-budget we came in at \_\_\_\_ over — mostly because we had to rerun recruitment in June.'

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3. 'The proposed process change from this retrospective is a \_\_\_\_ rule for every cross-border project going forward.'

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## Useful wrap-up phrases

*Match each phrase to its function.*

| Term                                                      | Meaning                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Headline first, detail after...                           | signal the structure of the briefing                  |
| In-scope, we delivered...                                 | state what actually shipped                           |
| On-budget we came in at...                                | give the honest financial number                      |
| The one thing we didn't see coming was...                 | name the biggest surprise without spinning it         |
| The proposed process change from this retrospective is... | convert the lesson into a concrete institutional rule |

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## Speaking · Own the project

10 min

Use the language of this unit — past simple + time markers, project vocabulary, structured wrap-up — to run these three tasks with a partner.

## Writing · Post-project stakeholder note (120-150 words)

12 min (or homework)

Write a 120-150 word wrap-up note to a senior internal stakeholder about a real (or realistic) project you've completed. Include: (a) a one-sentence headline naming date, scope and budget honestly, (b) the timeline with at least two specific time markers, (c) the one thing you didn't see coming, (d) the outcome (not just the output), (e) one concrete process change you're proposing. Use AT LEAST four past-simple verbs and THREE different time markers. Avoid: 'everything went well', 'the team did an amazing job', 'lessons were learned'.

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## Workbook

A big project — Workbook

### 1. Vocabulary in context

Complete each sentence with ONE word or phrase from the box. Two items are extra.

1. The \_\_\_ was clear from day one: launch a satellite office in Barcelona, no additional markets.
2. Our first \_\_\_ was signing the lease in March — that's when the project became real on the ground.
3. The final \_\_\_ was a working office with four staff on payroll and IT integrated with Lisbon.
4. The two most important \_\_\_ were the CEO and the future local team — everybody else could wait a week.
5. We were fully \_\_\_ but not \_\_\_, and definitely not \_\_\_ — we slipped by five weeks.
6. The \_\_\_ was a physical office. The \_\_\_ was that Iberia went from one country to two on our client map.

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7. We \_\_\_ the project formally in early February with an in-person kick-off meeting.

8. The launch date \_\_\_ from 4 September to 12 October — we announced the new date publicly, on the same day we decided.

## 2. Past simple + time markers

*Write the correct verb form and, where marked, the correct time marker.*

1. The project ran \_\_\_ February \_\_\_ September — seven months in total.

2. We \_\_\_ (open) the office \_\_\_ 12 October \_\_\_ 19:00 sharp.

3. Two of our new hires \_\_\_ (resign) \_\_\_ eight days of each other.

4. The lease \_\_\_ (be) signed two years \_\_\_ tomorrow — the anniversary is this week.

5. \_\_\_ the end of May we \_\_\_ (already / integrate) IT with Lisbon.

6. How long \_\_\_ the project \_\_\_ (take) in total? — \_\_\_ (about / seven months).

7. 'The project lasted \_\_\_ seven months' — NOT 'during seven months'.

## 3. Stakeholder-update register

*Choose the option that belongs in a written project update to a senior stakeholder.*

1. First line of an announcement that the launch date has moved:

- ☐ A. 'Yeah so basically the launch is going to slide a bit.'
- ☐ B. 'We are formally moving the launch from 4 September to 12 October; the reason and the new plan are below.'
- ☐ C. 'Fingers crossed we can pull it back by autumn.'

2. Which sentence best describes project success in an executive summary?

- ☐ A. 'It went really well, everyone was happy.'
- ☐ B. 'We delivered fully in-scope and only five weeks late; two years on, the office is still profitable and staffed by three of the four original hires.'
- ☐ C. 'It was fine, considering.'

3. Which sentence commits you the LEAST — and is therefore the weakest in a status update?

- ☐ A. 'By 18:00 Friday you'll have the revised plan in your inbox.'
- ☐ B. 'We'll do our best to update you as soon as we have something concrete.'
- ☐ C. 'The next milestone is 4 October — I'll flag any risk to it by end of week.'

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4. Which framing is honest, not spin?

- ☐ A. 'We are pushing back slightly to make sure everything is perfect for our clients.'
- ☐ B. 'We underestimated the local recruitment market in June and are moving the launch by five weeks; the new date is 12 October.'
- ☐ C. 'There have been some challenges around timing.'

5. 'The outcome' is different from 'the output' because:

- ☐ A. 'Outcome' sounds more formal, but they mean the same thing.
- ☐ B. 'Output' is what you built (the office). 'Outcome' is what changed because of it (client map, conversion rate).
- ☐ C. 'Outcome' is only used in financial reports.

## 4. Find and fix the mistake

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*Each sentence has ONE grammar or register mistake typical of A2+/B1 professionals. Rewrite it correctly.*

- 1. The project lasted during seven months.
- 2. Ago two years we opened the Barcelona office.
- 3. In 12 October we launched at 19:00 pm.
- 4. We didn't hit the milestone but we learn a lot.
- 5. The launch was slide from September to October.
- 6. In two years ago the office is still profitable.

## 5. Reading & discursive response

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*Read the short case, then answer.*

1. Case: A project manager knows on 15 May that the July launch is unrealistic. Her instinct is to 'keep pushing' quietly for two more weeks in the hope that things recover, and only tell the CEO on 1 June if they haven't. In 100–130 words, argue for OR against that instinct, using this unit's language (past simple + time markers, project vocabulary, output vs outcome, in-scope / on-budget / on-time). Give her one concrete alternative course of action.

## 6. Listening — mid-project 'we're moving the date' voicemail

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A project manager leaves a 60-second voicemail for the CEO. She has decided to move the launch date and wants him to hear it from her first. Listen (or read the transcript) and answer.

**1.** What is the caller's overall tone — and why is that a good choice?

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**2.** By WHAT DATE has the caller decided to speak, relative to the original launch?

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**3.** What SPECIFIC three pieces of information does she give in the voicemail?

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**4.** What is her explicit ask of the CEO?

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## 7. Writing — Post-project wrap-up email (120-150 words)

*Write a 120–150 word wrap-up email to a senior internal stakeholder about a real (or realistic) project you've completed. Include: (1) a one-sentence headline naming date, scope and budget honestly, (2) the timeline with at least two specific time markers, (3) the one thing you didn't see coming, (4) the outcome (not just the output), (5) one concrete process change you're proposing. Use AT LEAST four past-simple verbs and THREE different time markers. Do NOT use: 'everything went well', 'the team did an amazing job', 'lessons were learned'.*

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## 8. Case study preview

*Look at this unit's Case Study. Answer briefly.*

**1.** What is the main challenge in the case for Unit 9, and which stakeholder would you brief first?

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**2.** If you were the project lead, what is the ONE process change you would carry forward from this case — the equivalent of the two-hour check-in? Name it, own it, date it.

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