



APEX ENGLISH · A2 BUSINESS

Unit A2-10A

Plans for next month

Plans & next steps — from wish-list to roadmap

UNIT A2-10A

Plans for next month

Plans & next steps — from wish-list to roadmap · A2+ · 55–65 min · Business English



“A plan on paper is 50% of the work. The other 50% is deciding what NOT to do this month.”

— Rule of the small team

Objectives

- Turn a vague 'we should try this' into a concrete 30-day plan with an owner, a date and a first step.
- Use 'going to' vs 'will' vs present continuous for future — pick the right one for plans, decisions and diary items.
- Push back politely on unrealistic plans without killing the idea ('love the direction — the piece I'd rethink is...').
- Present three-month priorities in 60 seconds without waffle.

Class Book

Warm-up · Roadmap reflex

Solo · about you · 4 min

Think through these three questions in your head. We'll use your answers throughout the lesson.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

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- Name ONE thing you're going to do at work next month — with a date, not just 'soon'.
-
- Name ONE thing you keep saying you'll do 'next month' and never actually do. What's really blocking it?
-
- If your manager asked 'what are your top 3 priorities for the next 30 days?', what are the FIRST five words you'd say?
-

Lead-in · Advice clinic

Advice · they say, you reply · 8 min

Five colleagues describe a real 'next-month' problem. For each, decide the ONE sentence of advice you'd give — then reveal a model reply.

Follow-up: Notice the pattern in the strongest replies: they name the constraint (money, time, ownership) out loud AND offer a concrete next step. That's the exact move we're rehearsing today.

Reading · The month we finally learned to say 'not this month'

10 min

Last September our small marketing team had eleven active initiatives, three of them 'top priority'. Nothing was finishing. Everyone was busy. Morale was quietly falling. In our end-of-month review, my colleague Sara said one sentence that changed how we plan: 'We don't have a priority problem — we have a not-this-month problem.'

The following Monday we ran a ninety-minute session with one rule: for each of the eleven initiatives, we had to choose one of three labels — This Month, Next Month, or Later. Nothing was allowed to sit outside those three boxes. 'Someday' was banned. 'Ongoing' was banned. If nobody was willing to put their name against a date, the item went straight to Later.

Two things happened. First, seven of the eleven initiatives ended up in Later — and the world did not end. Second, the four items in This Month suddenly had a clear owner, a clear first step, and a clear date. We stopped opening every meeting with the words 'we should also...' and started opening them with 'this month we're doing these four things, and here's where each one is.'

The hardest part was not choosing what to do. The hardest part was telling three internal stakeholders that their pet project was in the Later column. What worked, in every case, was the same sentence: 'We're going to do this properly, but not this month — here's the month we're planning to start, and here's what we'd need from you to be ready.' Nobody argued. Nobody escalated. Two of them actually said 'thank you for being honest'.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Three months later, we're still using the three-column board. It has not made us less ambitious. It has made us finish things. And it turns out that a team that finishes four things a month is trusted with much bigger decisions than a team that starts eleven and finishes none.

Comprehension check

1. The central diagnosis in the text is that the team's real problem was...
 - ☐ A. Not working hard enough
 - ☐ B. Refusing to say 'not this month' to anything
 - ☐ C. A shortage of budget
2. The three-column board forced the team to...
 - ☐ A. Add more people to each project
 - ☐ B. Attach an owner and a date to anything they wanted to keep alive, or push it to Later
 - ☐ C. Cancel projects permanently
3. The strongest lesson of paragraph 4 is that stakeholders accept 'not this month' when...
 - ☐ A. You avoid mentioning their project at all
 - ☐ B. You commit to a specific future month and name what you'd need from them
 - ☐ C. You escalate the decision to a senior manager
4. The final paragraph argues that finishing four things a month is more valuable than starting eleven because...
 - ☐ A. It looks better on a slide
 - ☐ B. It builds the trust needed for bigger decisions later
 - ☐ C. Finishing is easier than starting

True, False or Not Given?

Choose based on the text only.

1. The team was allowed to leave initiatives in an 'Ongoing' column.
 - ☐ A. True
 - ☐ B. False
 - ☐ C. Not Given
2. Every stakeholder pushed back when their project was moved to Later.
 - ☐ A. True
 - ☐ B. False
 - ☐ C. Not Given

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

3. The team is still using the three-column board three months later.

- ☐ 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: 'we don't have a priority problem — we have a not-this-month problem.' Why is that reframing more useful than 'let's prioritise better'?

2. The polite deferral formula in the text is: 'we're going to do this properly, but not this month — here's the month, here's what we'd need from you.' Rewrite it for a real request YOU'd have to defer at work next month.

3. ****Discursive task (100–130 words).**** Sketch your OWN 'next month' plan for work. In your own words: (a) list two things you're firmly going to do next month, with a first step, (b) name one thing you're deliberately pushing to Later — and how you'll tell the person who wants it, (c) name one risk you're going to watch for and one signal that would make you replan. Use 'going to' and 'will' precisely (going to for plans; will for reactions/promises).

Vocabulary · Planning-language toolkit

10 min

Roles

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Term	Meaning
roadmap	a visual plan showing WHEN things will happen — not just WHAT
milestone	a specific checkpoint on the way to the goal — usually dated
deliverable	a concrete output that can be handed over — a report, a website, a signed contract
backlog	the list of things you'd like to do but haven't started — the 'Later' column
quick win	a small, cheap, fast action that produces a visible result — good for morale and trust
scope	what IS and what is NOT included in a plan — the boundary

Smalltalk

Term	Meaning
let's park it for now	polite defer — 'good idea, not this month'
circle back to that	come back to the topic later, on purpose
in the pipeline	already planned, moving through
on the back burner	deprioritised for now, not cancelled
further down the line	later, no exact date
it's on my radar	I'm aware, I'm tracking it, but not acting yet

Practice

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

1. We've got a clean ___ for Q4 — six items, with owners and dates on each.
2. The first ___ is the pricing decision by day 10. If we miss that, everything downstream slips.
3. The only ___ this month is the signed vendor contract — everything else is preparation.
4. Let's put the newsletter redesign in the ___ for now and pick it up in November.
5. Fixing the checkout typo isn't strategic, but it's a ___ — one hour of work, visible to every customer.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

6. Before we start, we need to agree on the ___ — what's in and what's explicitly out.
7. Great idea, but let's ___ ___ ___ and re-open it in the November planning session.
8. The Berlin office project is still ___ ___ ___ — just not this quarter.

Collocations · verb + noun (planning)

Match each verb with the correct noun / phrase.

Term	Meaning
set	a milestone
sign off on	the scope
clear	the backlog
ship	a deliverable
stay within	budget
push back	a deadline

Odd one out — register check

One option is far too casual (or wrong) for a professional planning meeting.

1. Deferring a stakeholder's idea — which is professional?
- ☐ A. 'Yeah, we'll get to it, whenever.'
 - ☐ B. 'Let's park that for now and pick it up in the November planning session.'
 - ☐ C. 'That's not happening.'
2. Announcing next month's focus — which is strongest?
- ☐ A. 'We've got loads of stuff planned.'
 - ☐ B. 'Next month we're shipping three things — pricing, the pop-up, and the new hire — with a clear owner on each.'
 - ☐ C. 'We'll see what happens.'

Grammar · future forms — going to · will · present continuous

14 min

1. Going to — plans and intentions already decided

am / is / are + going to + base verb. Used for decisions made BEFORE the moment of speaking.

- 'We're going to open a pop-up in Porto next month.' (already decided)
- 'She's going to lead the pricing review.' (owner already agreed)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

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- Questions: 'Are you going to hire this quarter?' 'What are you going to do about it?'

2. Will — decisions made AT the moment of speaking, promises, predictions

'll + base verb.

- Instant decision: 'OK — I'll take that action.' (decided just now, in the room)
- Promise: 'I'll send it by Friday.'
- Prediction / opinion about the future: 'I think the market will slow down in Q4.'
- ☐ Not for pre-agreed plans: ☐ 'We will open a pop-up next month' (if it's already planned) → ☐ 'We're going to open a pop-up next month.'

3. Present continuous — for diary items (arrangements with a fixed time)

am / is / are + verb-ing. Used when the future event is fixed in the diary — a meeting scheduled, a flight booked.

- 'I'm meeting the supplier on Tuesday at 3.' (in the calendar)
- 'We're launching on the 20th.' (date fixed)
- Native-speaker feel: this often sounds MORE concrete than 'going to' for scheduled events.

4. Time markers for future work planning

next week / month / quarter · in June · on the 20th · at 3pm · by Friday (= not later than) · within two weeks · from October · this coming Tuesday · a week on Monday (= Monday of next week) · in the near future (vague) · further down the line (very vague).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise A — Choose the most natural future form

Only ONE option is fully natural for A2+/B1 professional register.

1. In a planning meeting last week we agreed: 'We ___ open a pop-up in Porto next month.' (already decided together)
 2. Your boss asks 'Who wants to own the pricing review?' You raise your hand in the meeting: 'I ___ own it.'
 3. You're checking your calendar: 'I ___ (meet) the Barcelona supplier at 3pm on Tuesday.' (date fixed in the diary)
 4. A colleague asks 'do you think the market will slow down?' — 'Honestly, yes, I ___ it slows down in Q4.' (personal prediction, not a plan)
 5. Promising a deadline in an email: 'I ___ send you the draft by Friday.' (promise made in the message)
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Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise B — Rewrite in a more professional register

Rewrite each sentence so it fits a planning meeting. Add a specific date OR a specific owner.

1. 'We'll probably do something with the website soon.'

2. 'Someone should look at pricing.'

3. 'Maybe we'll hire.'

4. 'We'll get to that whenever.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise C — Diary vs plan vs promise

Choose the form that best fits the *FUNCTION* in brackets.

1. 'I ___ (fly) to Madrid on Thursday at 07:20.' [fixed flight, in the diary]

2. 'Don't worry — I ___ (send) you the slides tonight.' [promise made in the moment]

3. 'Next quarter we ___ (launch) three new SKUs — the plan is signed off.' [pre-agreed plan]

4. 'What time ___ you ___ (see) the client tomorrow?' [asking about a diary item]

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise D — Discursive: 90-word 30-day plan

Write a short paragraph (about 90 words) presenting YOUR real 30-day plan for next month. Use AT LEAST two 'going to' forms, one 'will' promise, and one present continuous with a fixed date. Include one item you're explicitly deferring.

1. Start with: 'Next month I'm going to focus on three things.'

Describe the picture



Look at the picture. In 5–6 sentences, describe what the team is doing NOW and what they are going to do next. Use present continuous for the moment, 'going to' for the plans, and one 'will' for a decision the woman with the marker is about to make.

Target language: In the picture, the team is standing... · They are sorting their initiatives into... · Four items are already in 'This month' — each one is going to... · The woman with the marker is deciding whether... · In a moment, she'll probably... · The 'Later' column is going to stay untouched until...

Listening · Two team leads run a 30-day planning check-in

10 min

Two team leads (Voice A, female — Ana, marketing lead; Voice B, male — Tomás, operations lead) run their monthly planning check-in. They have to agree what's IN for next month and what's deferred. Two voices.

Before you listen

- In a healthy monthly planning meeting, in what order do you expect: review of last month, this month's priorities, decisions being deferred, risks, decisions requiring senior sign-off?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

- Which of those does an inexperienced lead usually skip — and why does it matter?

Gist

1. What is the format of the conversation and how does it end?

2. What is the tone between the two leads?

Detail

1. Which two initiatives are confirmed for October?

2. What is being deferred, to when, and why?

3. What does Tomás promise to do BEFORE end of day?

Listen and complete

Complete with the exact words the speakers use.

1. Ana: 'For October, I'm going to own the pricing review, sign-off by the ____.'

2. Tomás: 'I ____ post the ad on the third — that's a promise.'

3. Ana: 'The Porto pop-up we're ____ ____ November — the supplier contract won't be in time.'

Useful planning-check-in phrases

Match each phrase to its function.

Term	Meaning
Where are we with...	open a check-in item without judgement
Let's timebox this to two minutes	cap discussion of a single point
Can we agree that...	test alignment out loud before writing anything down
Let's park that for November	polite formal deferral, with a named target month
Before we close, three things going in the notes...	recap the decisions at the end

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Speaking · Own your 30-day plan

10 min

Use the language of this unit — going to / will / present continuous, planning vocabulary, polite deferral — to run these three tasks with a partner.

Writing · Monthly planning email to the team (120-150 words)

12 min (or homework)

Write the monthly planning email you'd actually send to your team (120-150 words).
Structure: (1) one-sentence theme for the month, (2) the three priorities with owner + first step + date, (3) what's being deferred and to when, (4) one risk you're watching for, (5) how you'll signal to them if the plan needs to change. Use AT LEAST two 'going to' forms, one 'will' promise, and one present continuous with a fixed date. Do NOT use: 'exciting', 'lots going on', 'as always', 'stay tuned'.

Workbook

Plans for next month — Workbook

1. Vocabulary in context

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

1. We've got a clean ___ for Q4 — six items, with owners and dates on each.
2. The first ___ is the pricing decision by day 10 — if we miss it, everything downstream slips.
3. The only ___ this month is the signed vendor contract — everything else is just preparation.
4. Let's put the newsletter redesign in the ___ for now and pick it up in November.
5. Fixing the checkout typo isn't strategic, but it's a ___ — one hour of work, visible to every customer.
6. Before we start, we have to agree on the ___ — what's in and what's explicitly out of the project.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

7. Great idea, but let's ____ and re-open the conversation in November planning.

8. We might have to ____ by two weeks if the finance sign-off doesn't come through.

2. Future forms — going to · will · present continuous

Write the correct future form for the FUNCTION in brackets.

1. 'In our planning meeting last week we agreed: we ____ (open) a pop-up in Porto next month.' [pre-agreed plan]

2. 'Your boss asks who'll own the pricing review. You raise your hand: I ____ own it.' [decision made just now]

3. 'Checking your calendar: I ____ (meet) the Barcelona supplier at 3pm on Tuesday.' [fixed diary item]

4. 'Personal prediction, not a plan: honestly, I think the market ____ (slow down) in Q4.'

5. 'Promising a deadline in an email: I ____ (send) you the draft by Friday.'

6. 'Recap of a signed-off plan: next quarter we ____ (launch) three new SKUs.'

7. 'What time ____ you ____ (see) the client tomorrow?' [asking about a diary item]

3. Planning-meeting register

Choose the option that sounds professional in a real monthly planning meeting.

1. Deferring a stakeholder's pet project — which is professional?

- ☐ A. 'Yeah, we'll get to it, whenever.'
- ☐ B. 'Let's park it for now and re-open the conversation in the November planning session.'
- ☐ C. 'That's not happening.'

2. Announcing next month's focus — which is strongest?

- ☐ A. 'We've got loads of stuff planned.'
- ☐ B. 'Next month we're shipping three things — pricing, the pop-up, and the new hire — with a clear owner on each.'
- ☐ C. 'We'll see what happens.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

3. Committing to a deadline in the meeting — which is strongest?

- ☐ **A.** 'I'll try to get it done by Friday probably.'
- ☐ **B.** 'I'll send the draft by end of day Friday.'
- ☐ **C.** 'Soon.'

4. 'Someone should look at pricing.' — which rewrite is strongest?

- ☐ **A.** 'Someone will get to that eventually.'
- ☐ **B.** 'I'm going to lead the pricing review this quarter. First step this week: pull the last twelve months of margin data.'
- ☐ **C.** 'Pricing? Yeah, on the list.'

5. Pushing back on an unrealistic ask — which is professional?

- ☐ **A.** 'That's not going to happen.'
- ☐ **B.** 'I hear the urgency. October isn't realistic because the supplier contract won't be signed in time. Would November work — I'd have a clean plan by day one?'
- ☐ **C.** 'Fine, we'll try.' (when you already know you can't)

4. Find and fix the mistake

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

1. 'We will open a pop-up in Porto next month' — said in the recap of a plan agreed three weeks ago.

2. 'I'm going to send you the file, don't worry.' — said as a promise the moment your colleague asks for it.

3. 'What time are you going to see the client tomorrow?' [asking about a fixed diary item]

4. 'We're going to have opened the shop by December.' — talking about a planned deadline.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

5. 'Yeah, someone should do that eventually.'

6. 'The Berlin project is on the back burner, but we're going to definitely maybe start it in Q4 probably.'

5. Reading & discursive response

Read the short case, then answer.

1. Case: A team lead is running her first monthly planning meeting. She's inherited eleven active initiatives and a stakeholder culture where 'no' is very rare and 'let's do everything' is very common. In 100–130 words, argue for a concrete process she should use to structure the meeting AND handle the deferral conversations with the three most-affected stakeholders. Use this unit's language (going to · will · present continuous · milestone · scope · park it for now · quick win). She should walk out of the meeting with (a) a clear top-three, (b) explicit deferrals, and (c) a plan for the stakeholder messages.

6. Listening — 60-second planning voicemail

A senior colleague leaves a 60-second voicemail to help a new team lead prepare for her first monthly planning meeting. Listen (or read the transcript) and answer.

1. What is the caller's overall goal in leaving this voicemail?

2. What specific tool does the caller recommend and why?

3. What does the caller explicitly tell her NOT to do in the meeting?

4. Name the ONE closing tip the caller gives.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

7. Writing — monthly planning email to the team (120-150 words)

Write the monthly planning email you'd actually send to your team (120-150 words).

Structure: (1) one-sentence theme for the month, (2) the three priorities with owner + first step + date, (3) what's being deferred and to when, (4) one risk you're watching for, (5) how you'll signal to them if the plan needs to change. Use AT LEAST two 'going to' forms, one 'will' promise, and one present continuous with a fixed date. Do NOT use: 'exciting', 'lots going on', 'as always', 'stay tuned'.

8. Case study preview

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

1. What is the main planning challenge in the case for Unit 10, and which stakeholder is under the most pressure?

2. If you were coaching that stakeholder, what is the ONE deferral sentence you would give them to say out loud — the equivalent of 'we're going to do this properly, but not this month'?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
