

02

Information exchange

Learning objectives

This unit is the first to focus on the language of meetings. Many business English students will attend meetings in English with native and non-native speakers of English. Students may need to draw on a range of language and skills to ensure a successful meeting, so the sequence of units on meetings provides a wide range of language input and encourages students to develop key communication skills.

Students start with a discussion of their personal experiences of business meetings and read a joke which has been circulated on the web. They focus on buzzwords and play a language game to practise these. They then study common business collocations.

Students consider how direct and indirect different cultures are. They do an exercise matching vague language extracts from a meeting with their blunt equivalents. They then listen to and summarize the meeting, and do fluency practice paraphrasing some indirect statements.


In the next section, students do a listening task in which they try and spot discrepancies, followed by a fluency task with the same aim. Students do a further listening task and practise rephrasing statements. They do an exercise to practise opposites, and then focus on conditionals.

In the next section, students study a number of extracts from meetings in order to identify the missing word in a number of key phrases, and then listen to a recording in order to check their answers. They do further practice using meeting phrases.

In the final section, they participate in a fluency activity. Students read different sets of information, then introduce some radical proposals at a meeting. The lesson concludes with students completing a memo summarizing the conclusions of the meeting.

The grammatical focus is on conditional forms and the lexical focus is on the language of meetings.

Digital resources: Unit 2

Online Workbook;  In company interviews Units 1–2 and worksheet; Extension worksheets; Glossary; Phrase bank; Student's Book answer key; Student's Book listening script; Fast-track map

1:1

This unit focuses on meetings. Before you begin, discuss with your student the kind of meetings they usually attend. Find out as much as you can about the meetings.

In this first section, students think about their own involvement in meetings. They read a joke which has been circulated on the web, and focus on a range of buzzwords. They do an exercise to practise some useful collocations.


Warm-up

Check that students understand the expression *Murphy's Law* (the principle that if something can possibly go wrong, it will). Find out reactions to the quotation.

- 1 Ask: *What exactly is a meeting?* and elicit ideas from students, e.g. some people feel that informal discussions with colleagues count as meetings; others think that meetings should always have an agenda and finish with an action plan.
- 2 Find out if anyone has seen this joke circulated on the web. You may need to look at some of the vocabulary, such as: *to gossip, to flirt, a nap, offload*.
- 3 Be ready to provide some examples of buzzwords in business, such as: *credit crunch, mindset*. Ask students to tell you what the buzzwords are in their field.
- 4 Do the first word with all students as an example. Then, students can work in pairs to complete the task.

ANSWERS

- 1 mindset 2 core competencies 3 paradigm shift
4 proactive 5 synergize 6 outside the box 7 drill down
8 buy-in 9 the next level 10 reality check 11 the bottom line
12 the big picture 13 benchmark 14 ramp up
15 empowerment

- 5  **1.06** Ask students to select their bingo card from page 119 ready for the game.

 **1.06**

A: Okay, people. Let's get the ball rolling. Well, you've all seen the latest figures and I don't need to tell you they're not good. It's clearly time for a reality check, ladies and gentlemen. This division is about to go under if we don't change our attitude and fast. What we need is a complete change of mindset. We need to synergize and take a much more proactive approach to product development. The same tired old ideas simply won't work any more. If we always do what we've always done, then we'll always get what we've always got. And what got us where we are won't get us where we're going.

B: I'm sorry?

- A: What I mean is we need to be thinking outside the box, maximizing our creativity. Yes, that's right. I'm talking about nothing less than a complete paradigm shift in the management of this company.
- B: What's he talking about?
- C: I don't know.
- A: Okay, the bottom line is: if we don't figure out how to turn this operation around, we have no future in this business. So, let's look at the big picture and then see if we can drill down to the details.
- D: Can I just say something, Daryl?
- A: Fire away, Kelly.
- D: Erm, I don't think we're quite with you.
- A: I'm trying to say that it's very important I get your buy-in on this. What we have to do is establish what our core competencies are and then benchmark ourselves against the current market leader. Right now we're struggling just to compete. If we can only learn from our competitors, then we'll be able to upskill our own people, ramp up product development, and start to take this company to the next level.
- C: Erm, and you really want our input on this?
- A: Yes, Nigel. Change begins at the grassroots in an organization. Empowerment – that's what this is all about.
- D: Daryl?
- A: Yes, Kelly.
- D: Have you ever played buzzword bingo?

6 Write *production margins* and *profit methods* on the board. Ask students to say what is wrong with the expressions and to give the correct collocations. Ask students to continue finding the correct collocations. Then check answers with the class.

Tell students that many of these collocations constitute core business language and they need to ensure they can use them. Check pronunciation of the compounds, highlighting difficult words like: *campaign*, *budget* and *recruitment*. Get students to mark the correct stress.

1:1

Put the words in each column onto different colour cards. This will allow your student to experiment with the collocations by moving the cards around.

ANSWERS

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| a 1 production methods | 2 balance sheets | 3 market trends |
| 4 staff appraisals | 5 profit margins | 6 distribution channels |
| b 1 quality control | 2 sales projections | 3 advertising campaigns |
| 4 cost cutting | 5 supply chains | 6 product development |
| c 1 customer relations | 2 recruitment procedures | 3 salary reviews |
| 4 training budgets | 5 price setting | 6 IT support |

7 Ask students to work in pairs. Tell them that they should not use the actual words in the collocations, or any derivatives (for example, they cannot say *supplier* when explaining *supply*) but can use any other words they like.

At the end of the exercise, ask students which collocations are the most important for them to use in their fields.

1:1


Take turns with your student to explain these terms. Alternatively, prepare a few examples to go through with your student first, then hand over to the student to create explanations from the remaining collocations.

Making things clear

In this section, students first think about how direct various nationalities are. They then match a set of indirect statements with their more direct equivalents. They listen to an extract from a meeting in order to check their answers and then summarize the meeting. Finally, they paraphrase indirect statements in a more direct way.

1 Give examples of statements in a direct and indirect culture, e.g. *Shut the window./It's a bit cold in here*. Find out what kind of culture students are from. Ask them to do the exercise and then ask if they agree with the suggested answers on page 137.

2 Write these two sentences on the board: *We will be looking at the possibility of downsizing* and *People may lose their jobs*. Ask what the sentences have in common (they both state that people may be made redundant, but the first is indirect and the second is more direct). Ask students which style of expression is preferred in the culture/company where they work and if they have experienced any difficulties in interpreting 'vague' language. Ask students to match the lists of statements. Don't check the answers at this stage.

3  **1.07** With weaker groups, check/pre-teach: *dismally*, *to overreact*, *innovative*, *clone*, *outsourcing*. Tell students they are going to listen to an extract from a meeting to check their answers in 2. Play the recording.

ANSWERS

- a 4 b 6 c 2 d 8 e 7 f 3 g 1 h 5

 **1.07**

- A: Right. That brings us on to our main business this morning – the new Quasar Online Gaming System. As you already know, the news is not particularly good. In spite of a considerable investment in design and marketing, I'm sorry to report that the project has not been a complete success.
- B: Not a complete success? What you mean is it's failed – *dismally*!
- A: Now let's not overreact, Alan. Certainly, it's failed to meet our original expectations. And, yes, technically speaking, we have run into negative profit ...
- B: Negative profit! What do you mean negative profit? You mean we've made a loss – an enormous loss if these figures are anything to go by!

- C: Can we come back to the figures later, Alan, if that's okay? First, let's consider why sales are so disappointing. Now, in my view, it's not the product, but the market. I think there's a general lack of consumer confidence.
- B: In other words, sales are falling. Look, I'm sorry, Hannah, but you're just looking for excuses. It's obvious that Quasar is simply not innovative enough for today's market.
- A: Alan, we leave innovation to companies like Sony and Nintendo. What we do is clone the technology and do it cheaper.
- C: Alan, you know we've always been a market-driven organization ...
- B: Market-driven? What you really mean is we've never had an original idea. I say we need to be developing an innovative new product line ...
- A: What, when the market's so massively oversupplied? I don't think so. Now is not the time to expand, but to consolidate.
- B: So what you're saying is, let's do nothing.
- A: No, I'm saying let's consolidate.
- B: I see. And what will this 'consolidation' mean in terms of our staff? Redundancies, I suppose.
- C: Well, obviously, there will have to be some restructuring of the department.
- B: You mean people are going to lose their jobs.
- C: It's a possibility, yes. And we may also have to consider outsourcing production to cut costs.
- B: In other words, our assembly plant may be closed down too. I can't believe I'm hearing this!
- A: Of course, we won't be able to finalise anything today.
- B: You mean we'll have to hold another meeting! If we've all still got a job by then, that is.
- A: Yes, well, I'm glad you raised that point, Alan.
- B: What do you mean?

4 Ask if students wish to hear the recording again before they summarize the meeting. Students can work in pairs to summarize the meeting.

5 Write the four expressions in the box on the board and ask students to mark the main stress. Divide the class into pairs and ask students to read and respond to the vague statements.


1:1

Ask your student to read out sentences a–c, and paraphrase each of them in a more direct way. Then, exchange roles for sentences d–f. When you have finished, ask your student to comment on whether he or she is from a direct or a more indirect culture.

Queries and comments

In this section, students get practice in listening for discrepancies and do a roleplay in which they point out information which does not make sense. They listen to another meeting in which a CEO breaks bad news to the

board; students formulate the board members' queries and comments from given prompts. They complete exercises on opposites and work on conditional forms.

1  **1.08** Write the word *discrepancy* on the board and give these examples to clarify the meaning: *a discrepancy between estimated and actual spending; there was some discrepancy in the statement he gave to the police.*

Check/Pre-teach: *appraisal, to go on about, overspend, confidential.* Note that there is a short pause in each extract to give students the time to discuss the discrepancy. With stronger groups, play the first extract, pausing at the beep, and elicit the discrepancy as a class example. Then play the rest of the recording, pausing at each beep, and ask students to complete the task. Check answers with the class. With weaker groups, play the five extracts through once and ask students to list the main topic of each discussion but do not mention the discrepancy at this stage (a appraisals; b salary increases; c project budget and schedule; d main markets; e bringing in an outside consultant). Then play the recording again, pausing to allow students to point out the discrepancies.

ANSWERS

- The meeting is an hour and a half long, not an hour.
- The company pays employees twice as much as its competitors, not three times.
- The project was supposed to take 16 weeks, not three months.
- He said the company isn't doing well in the Far East, yet China is its biggest market.
- He said he doesn't want to bring in people from outside the company but is thinking of bringing in his golf partner to help.



1.08

Meeting 1

- A: Right, I'm allowing an hour and a half for this meeting. Kate is going to fill us in on how the appraisals went. That'll take about a quarter of an hour or so. So that only gives us 45 minutes to deal with everything else. We'd better get started.
- B: Sorry, I thought we had an hour and a half.
- A: What? Oh, yeah, sorry. We've got 75 minutes, haven't we? Still, there's a lot to get through.

Meeting 2

- A: Look, it's no good going on about pay rises. We pay nearly twice what most of our competitors do. And I really don't see how people can expect another salary increase this year, when they're already earning three times the average rate.
- B: Hang on a second. You said we pay twice as much, not three times.
- A: Hmm? Oh, all right, twice as much, then. It's still a lot more than everybody else.

Meeting 3

- A: You know as well as I do that this project was supposed to take sixteen weeks. And this isn't the first time we've run over budget, is it? I mean a 20% overspend is pretty serious. And surely three months was sufficient time to complete the project.

B: Just a minute. I thought you said 16 weeks, not three months.

A: Okay, okay, that's four months, then. But you've taken nearly six.

Meeting 4

A: Frankly, with the Asian economic situation the way it is and both the euro and the dollar going up and down, we're not doing well in the Far East. South America is where we should be concentrating our efforts. As a matter of fact, Brazil is now our second biggest market after China.

B: Hold on. Didn't you just say we're not doing well in the Far East?

A: Well, I meant apart from China, obviously! China's always been a huge market for tobacco products.

Meeting 5

A: I'm sorry, but I don't want us bringing in people from outside the company to sort this problem out. There's a lot of highly confidential information on our intranet. And we should really be able to deal with this ourselves. There's a guy I play golf with who runs his own consultancy. He's offered to help us out.

B: Wait a moment. You just said you didn't want to bring in people from outside the company.

A: Erm, well, what I mean is I don't want just anybody. This guy's different. I've known him for years.

2 Some students are quite reticent to point out discrepancies to other speakers, so review polite ways of doing this: *Sorry, I thought you said ...*, *Hold on a second, didn't you just say ...?*, *Wait a minute. You just said ...*, *didn't you?*

Divide the class into AB pairs. Refer the A students to page 119 and the B students to page 128. Give students time to read their reports. Help as necessary.

Model the activity by asking one student to read the first few lines of their report and getting the class to highlight the discrepancy. Refer students to the *Useful language* boxes after each role card.

Monitor and take feedback notes. If students fail to spot all seven discrepancies, ask them to repeat the task. Give feedback on how well students handled the interruptions and on overall fluency, before highlighting any important or common language errors.

1:1

Put the useful language for pointing out discrepancies on cards (*Sorry, I thought you said ... etc*). Ask your student to read out these expressions in order to practise the intonation and stress. Then ask your student to turn to page 119 and read Speaker A's text aloud – you should interrupt whenever there is a discrepancy in order to model the activity. Then, turn to page 128 and read out Speaker B's text. This time, your student should try to point out the seven discrepancies.

3 **1.09** To lead in to the activity, ask students to brainstorm the type of news the CEO could be about to give. With weaker classes, ask students to skim the extract and elicit examples of the bad news given by the

CEO, e.g. disappointing sales figures, high production costs, inefficient distributors. With weaker groups, check/pre-teach: *projection, quarter (three months), in a row, to pick up, to break even, to phase out, drastic, layoff, to slide (into debt), to implement, a volatile market.*

Focus attention on the key words and the example and establish the kind of changes students need to make – tense, question word order, adding prepositions and pronouns, etc. Point out that there are both questions and comments and that students need to pay attention to the punctuation given with the key words. Then play the extract for students to compare their answers.

ANSWERS

- b Are you suggesting we introduce price cuts?
- c Surely you're not saying it's time to phase them out!
- d Does this mean we should be investing more in new technology?
- e Are you telling us there could be lay-offs?
- f You mean some kind of job-share scheme?
- g So you're saying we should be spending more on R&D.
- h Does this mean you're thinking of centralizing distribution?
- i I hope you're not suggesting the situation is hopeless.



1.09

- A: Okay, everyone. It's bad news, I'm afraid. As you may have heard, the latest European sales figures are looking extremely disappointing.
- B: Are you saying they've fallen short of projections again?
- A: I'm afraid so. In fact, we may be 30% down. Now, this will be the third quarter in a row we've missed our targets and, frankly, unless things pick up considerably next quarter, we may have to rethink our whole pricing strategy.
- C: Are you suggesting we introduce price cuts?
- A: If we still can, Anna. Certainly if we'd done that a year ago, it might have stimulated demand. But do it now and we may end up running at a loss. As you know, we're barely breaking even on some of our product lines as it is.
- D: Surely you're not saying it's time to phase them out!
- A: No, no, of course not. At least, not yet. But what I am saying is that we need to keep production costs down somehow if we want to remain competitive.
- B: Does this mean we should be investing more in new technology?
- A: If only it was that simple, Erik. But right now we're not really in a position to invest in anything, even if we wanted to. No, I'm afraid the situation calls for more drastic action. It's clearly time for a major restructuring.
- D: Are you telling us there could be lay-offs?
- A: I don't see how we can avoid it, James – unless, of course, we can get some of our people to accept reduced hours.
- C: You mean some kind of job-share scheme?

A: Yes, either that or introduce a four-day week – providing the unions don't oppose it. Of course, it's not just a question of costs. It's also a question of product. The fact is, better products are coming onto the market all the time.

D: So you're saying we should be spending more on R&D.

A: As I've said, capital investment is no longer an option for us. Pour any more money into R&D and we'll simply slide further into debt. And then there are all the problems we've been having with our overseas distributors.

B: Does this mean you're thinking of centralising distribution?

A: Well, that's one option, yes. But even if we decided to do that, and it's a big if, it would take time to implement – time we simply don't have. As you know, our share price has fallen to an all-time low of just 85 cents. And I wouldn't be surprised if, by our next meeting, it's fallen even further. The fact is, we're selling old products at inflated prices in a volatile market through inefficient distributors.

D: I hope you're not suggesting the situation is hopeless.

A: Well, let's put it this way: we've cancelled the summer party!

4 Students can work in pairs or individually to discuss these opposites. Check answers with the class.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

a encouraging figures b exceed projections c reach our targets
d run at a profit e phase them in f the unions approve it
g crawl out of debt h domestic distributors i reduced prices
j stable markets

5 With weaker classes, do a short review of the forms used in each clause with present and past conditionals. Students often make mistakes with the tense in the *if*-clause. Students re-read the extract and answer questions a–f. Ask students to compare their answers before checking with the whole class. Note that in addition to the conditional sentences, there are two examples of phrases in which one speaker answers the previous speaker's question conditionally: *If we still can, Anna* and *If only it was that simple, Erik*. As a follow-up task, ask students to ask and answer questions with a partner using the cues: *What would you do if ...?* and *What would you have done if ...?*

ANSWERS

a nine b unless, and, providing c If we'd done that a year ago, it might have stimulated demand. d It shows that the decision is unlikely. e I wish it was that simple. f We don't want to invest in anything.

Language links

Direct students to the *Language links* section on pages 18–19 for further explanation of the use of conditionals, and an exercise to practise them.


The language of meetings

In this section, students do a vocabulary exercise and listen to meeting extracts, focusing on the expressions used. They then do a further vocabulary exercise.

1 Before students start the exercise, write the word *meeting* on the board and ask students to brainstorm types of meeting. Ask students to check how many examples they were able to predict from the meetings listed in 1. Students then complete the extracts a–h with the missing word. Don't check answers at this stage.

Language links

Direct students to the *Language links* section on page 18 for more on the language of meetings and, in particular, metaphorical language and idiomatic expressions.

2  **1.10** Play the recording for students to check their answers. Focus attention on the short introductory words *Look, ..., Well, ..., Right ..., Now, ...* and ask what effect they have (they can make what the speaker is saying more forceful or show that what follows is a serious point).

ANSWERS

a position b question c option d answer e problem
f point g situation h fact

 **1.10**

a

A: Right. Basically, the position is this: the contract is ours if we want it.
B: But we're not in a position to take on another project right now, are we?
A: I know. Jan, what's your position on this?

b

A: Look, it's not just a question of software, Alessandro.
B: Of course not. It's also a question of hardware. The entire system needs upgrading.
A: But that's out of the question. We can't afford that kind of capital outlay.

c

A: Sales are down. One option would obviously be to cut our prices.
B: That's no longer an option for us. We're barely breaking even as it is.
A: Well, then we've no option but to rethink our whole marketing strategy.

d

A: Well, there's no easy answer to this, but how about voluntary redundancy?
B: I don't think that's the answer, but maybe we could reduce people's hours.
A: That might have been the answer if we didn't already have a strike on our hands!

e

A: Now, let's not make a problem out of this. What if we just pulled out of Sudan?

B: Well, I've no problem with that, but our partners won't be happy.

A: No, but that's not our problem, is it? The political situation is just too unstable.

f

A: I'll get straight to the point. We're getting too many customer complaints.

B: I agree with you. But the point is we don't have the staff to deal with them.

A: That's beside the point. We shouldn't be getting them in the first place!

g

A: I'm afraid the situation is serious. And if the press get hold of the story, ...

B: Look, we'll deal with that situation if and when it arises. Let's not panic just yet.

A: You're right. What this situation calls for is calm and careful planning.

h

A: The fact is, we're simply not spending enough on R&D.

B: As a matter of fact, we've doubled our R&D budget this year.

C: That may be so, but the fact remains we're losing our technological lead.

3 Students complete this activity individually or in pairs.

ANSWERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a opinion – I disagree! | b question – That's irrelevant! |
| c view – What about me? | d point – Good point! |
| e option – That's unimportant! | f idea – You're wrong! |

Language links

Direct students to the *Phrase bank* in the *Language links* section on page 19 for more on useful expressions for debating issues in meetings and discussions.

Breaking the bad news

In this final section, students take part in a fluency activity by roleplaying an interdepartmental meeting.

1 Introduce the topic by asking students to define a 'hostile' takeover (one in which the company that is taken over is not happy about the acquisition). Set the scene by telling students that their company has been taken over by a competitor and everyone is waiting to find out what changes will be implemented by the new board. Tell students that they will be expected to support changes that the board would like to implement and to present them in a positive way. Pre-teach: *feng shui*.

Divide the class into ABCs. Tell students to study the proposals on the following pages: As on page 118, Bs on page 128 and Cs on page 133 and prepare for the meeting.

2 Remind students that they will need to present the proposals in a positive way and that they should discuss potential objections and decide how best to counter them. Give students time to discuss each aspect of the proposals.

Explain that while each group presents their proposals, the rest of the class should take the part of the company staff and raise queries and objections. It is the job of the presenters to deal with these as positively as possible and also to note comments and suggestions for the follow-up report. Review the useful language in the box.

Set a 30-minute time limit for the meeting. Draw up an agenda, so students know the order of the proposals. Appoint one student as the chairperson. Monitor and take notes.

3 After the meeting, give adequate time for students to complete the memos.

1:1

Ask your student to choose which topic they would like to present: work environment, travel budget or language training, and focus them on that information at the back of the book (Speaker A, page 118; Speaker B, page 128; or Speaker C, page 133). Give your student time to prepare. When your student is ready, ask them to announce the bad news in a mini-presentation. Set an approximate time for the activity, such as 10–15 minutes.

Language links

ANSWERS

Vocabulary
Meetings

Metaphor: discussion is a journey

1 nearer, getting there, on the right track, a long way to go, going round in circles, making good progress, got sidetracked, returning to, go back to, getting ahead of, got as far as, getting very far, drifted, away, heading, wandered away from, coming to, covered a lot of ground, as far as we can go, come this far

Idiomatic expressions

2 deleted words – a guess b much c sit d speaking
e each f so g responses h view i couldn't j No
and yes k can't l spare m on n taken o for
p meaning q a point

3 1 a, c, g, l 2 d, h, p 3 e, k, n 4 o 5 f, i, m 6 b, j, q

Grammar

Conditionals

b 3 c 3 d 2 e 1 f 3 g 2 h 3 i 3

Phrase bank

Debating issues

a point b question c position d fact e option f time