

ENGLISH FOR MEETINGS



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Managing effective meetings can be an art form that requires balancing and dealing with interruptions, digressions, and strong personalities. It might feel like a juggling act trying to keep all these pieces in the air, and the task becomes doubly difficult when you add the challenge of managing the meeting in English. This series will look at different functions of the business meeting and provide useful English phrases that can provide easier understanding, as well as finer nuance of your meaning.

In this series, you will learn English phrases for:

1. Opening & Closing a Meeting
2. Giving Opinions & Suggestions
3. Agreeing
4. Disagreeing
5. Asking for Feedback
6. Managing Communication

In each section you will find standard English phrases that you can mix, match and adapt to your specific content.

OPENING A MEETING



STARTING A MEETING

Let's start on the right foot. After everyone has arrived, the chairperson should officially start the meeting. There are a few simple ways to do this that are natural and friendly:

- Ok everyone, let's get started.
- Ok, shall we start?
- Right, let's begin.
- Can we start, please?
- Let's start with ...

WELCOMING

Once the meeting starts, the chairperson can welcome everyone to the meeting and thank them for coming. The chairperson might also take this time to make introductions or welcome special guests.

- Thank you for taking the time to attend this meeting.
- Thank you all for being here today
- I'd like to start by welcoming Mrs. ...
- I'd like to introduce Mr...

INTRODUCING THE MEETING OBJECTIVES

Next, the speaker should give a brief outline of the objectives, agenda, and format of the meeting.

- We're here today to solve ...
- The main aim/purpose/objective of this meeting is to discuss...
- I've organised this meeting to discuss how to identify ...
- The purpose of today's meeting is to brainstorm ...
- The goal of today's meeting is to develop...
- Let's review the meeting's goals....

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE

You can combine any of these phrases to form a meeting opening that is complete and appropriate for your purposes:

Right, let's begin. Thank you all for being here today. I'd like to start by welcoming Mrs. Jones from our American office. The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the new strategy in

Ok everyone, let's get started. Thank you for taking the time to attend this meeting. We're here today to solve ...

GETTING FEEDBACK



In this section, we'll look at different English phrases to build participation and get everyone involved in the meeting's discussion. Using some of these English phrases can build a lively meeting with lots of ideas and input, hopefully leading to better decision making.

OPENING FOR FEEDBACK

You can simply open the meeting with a few of these expressions to let people know that their ideas are expected and encouraged. Also, it might help people feel more comfortable sharing their ideas. These expressions are commonly heard at the start of the meeting or whenever there is a lull (slow moment) in the discussion.

- I'd like to hear what everyone thinks about each idea.
- I'm open to feedback
- Let's try to brainstorm some ideas. Would anybody like to start?
- Does anybody have any ideas?
- How do you suggest we deal with this?

ASKING FOR OPINIONS

These English expressions also encourage people to share their ideas and opinions, but with a specific topic in mind.

- What's your opinion?
- I'd like your opinion on this
- What's your point of view on this
- Can we have your thoughts on this
- What do you think?
- What do you think about this?
- How do you feel about this?

FOCUSING A DISCUSSION ON THE CAUSE

These English expressions direct the meeting participants to dig deeper into the reasons for a situation.

- What are the underlying causes of ...
- What is at the root of this problem?
- What's behind this ...?

GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Using these English expressions can encourage people further to participate.

- I think we are on the right track.
- We are definitely on the same page now.
- I think we're all on the same wavelength.

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE

Chairperson: **I'm open to feedback. Your opinions are important, so I'd like to hear what everyone thinks. Let's try to brainstorm some ideas. Would anybody like to start? Does anybody have any ideas?**

Donna: I have an idea

Chairperson: Yes Donna, **what's your opinion on?**

Donna: We could lower prices. This would lead to an immediate increase in sales volume.

Chairperson: **Great idea.** Looking around the room, **I can see that we're all on the same page**

GIVING OPINIONS & SUGGESTIONS



In this instalment of English for Meetings, we will look at how to share your ideas. You may notice how when you speak in your native language, you have a million ways to give an opinion or suggestion, but in English, you always say “I think”, or “in my opinion”. In this session you will learn new nuances to moderate how weak or strong your statements are, or how polite or confident you are.

GIVING AN OPINION

Here are a few standard ways to express an opinion.

- In my opinion...
- From my point of view ...
- My view is that ...
- I think
- I’m in favour of ...
- I feel that...

GIVING NEUTRAL OPINIONS

You may not want to commit to any particular line of thinking at the moment. These phrases can help you to participate while playing it safe.

- I think both options are good.
- Overall there's good and bad points for each option.
- I can see advantages and disadvantages for both.

GIVING STRONG OPINIONS

If you need to be stronger or more emphatic, give these a try.

- I'd like to point out that...
- Let me emphasize that ...
- We need to understand that

MAKING A SUGGESTION

Suggesting an alternative plan of action is a little different. These might seem a bit different from what you expect; There are a lot of negatives and questions, but this is the way we normally give suggestions. Notice that we don't often say "I propose". It is possible, but is often more formal than necessary.

- Maybe / Perhaps we could ...
- Shall we try to ...
- What if we
- Why don't we ...
- Why not ...
- We could
- Let's
- Perhaps we should
- I recommend we ...
- I suggest we ...
- One possibility / alternative would be to ...
- I've got a suggestion, ...
- Have we thought about...?
- Have you considered ... ?

MAKING A STRONG SUGGESTION

Making a strong suggestion is more straightforward grammar-wise, and is a bit easier than making a standard suggestion.

- I strongly recommend that we
- There's no alternative. We need to ...
- We have to / We need to
- We must ...

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE

Chairperson: Mark, **I'd like to hear your thoughts on** Donna's suggestion.

Mark: Sounds good. I feel that it's just what we need at the moment. And **why don't we** combine the price cut with a targeted marketing campaign? It **could** make the price cut twice as effective.

Donna: **I'd like to point out that** our social media presence is much weaker than the competition currently. **We need to** build our performance in social media, and **I strongly recommend that** we do it soon. **What if** this marketing campaign was primarily on social media instead of our usual marketing channels?

Chairperson: We hear you loud and clear Donna. Are we all in agreement then?

AGREEING



Agreeing in a meeting in English is pretty risk free. You won't get much friction or heat when you tell someone that they are absolutely right. However learning some of these phrases will add some diversity or nuance to your repertoire.

TOTAL AGREEMENT

You are probably already using "yes" or "I agree" fairly often, but try the following 'Total Agreement' phrases to add a little spice and flavour to your routine.

- I totally agree with you.
- I'm 100% behind you.
- I completely agree
- I couldn't agree more
- Absolutely

PARTIAL AGREEMENT

Agreeing with your counterpart is great for moving things along in the meeting, but how do you say 'yes' when you don't agree with them? These 'Partial Agreement' phrases can be very useful for maintaining communication, growing relationships, and finding consensus. They are especially effective because they build bridges when there are disagreements. They focus the discussion on the common ground that you all share and draw attention to what you agree on.

For example,

"I see where you're coming from", doesn't mean that you agree with the person or their idea. It simply means that you understand them, and you understand why they said that.

If you want to focus on the positive, you can use 'I agree with you that... but...'.

"I agree with you that we need to cut costs, but we need to honour our current obligations"

- I see what you mean
- I can see what you're getting at
- I see where you're coming from
- I hear you
- I know what you're talking about
- I see your point
- You have a point
- You've brought up a very valid point
- I agree with you that.... but...

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE:

John:	We need to cut costs, and we should start by finding cheaper suppliers.
Donna:	I completely agree with you. That's a great place to find cost savings.
Tim:	I agree that we need to cut costs, but our supplier contracts are legal obligations that could have long term consequences
John:	I see what you mean
Donna:	I get your point. What areas do you recommend that we cut costs, Tim?

DISAGREEING



DISAGREEING STRONGLY

Disagreeing in a meeting can be like walking through a minefield. In an English meeting you might find yourself often saying 'no', or 'I disagree'. This language is strong and final, and has its function and place. Here are a few more examples of how to disagree strongly

- I totally disagree
- I couldn't agree less
- It's not possible
- You're quite wrong
- I can't see that idea working
- This option isn't feasible
- It's just not suitable at this time
- It will be very difficult to implement

DISAGREEING USING 'BUT'

If you use a more cooperative approach and are trying to move together towards a mutually agreed decision, you can try softer language. In the section on Agreeing in meetings, the following language was introduced. It offers the advantage in combining your 'no' with a 'yes'

- I see what you mean, (but)
- I see your point, (but)
- I can see what you're getting at, (but)
- I see where you're coming from, (but)
- I hear you, (but)
- I know what you're talking about, (but)
- I'm not against it, (but)
- You have a point, (but)

DISAGREEING USING QUESTIONS

It is also possible to say 'no' in a meeting without ever saying the word 'no'. You can show that you disagree but simply asking a question.

- Are you sure about that point?
- What's the evidence to support that idea?
- Is that really true in this case?
- Won't that idea put us even further behind schedule?
- Have you considered ... ?
- What about ...?

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE:

Tim:	We could cut costs by reducing our R&D budget
Donna:	Are you sure about that? Reducing R&D could destroy our competitive advantage in the long term.
Tim:	I see where you're coming from, but our new strategy as a low cost producer requires less focus on R&D
John:	I can't see that idea working. The R&D budget has already been cut substantially.
Donna:	Cutting the R&D budget is just not feasible at this time.

MANAGING COMMUNICATION

Disagreeing is not the only tricky part of a meeting. Interruptions are also difficult to manage as is the flow of the meeting. In this section of English for meetings, you will learn how to keep the communication flowing.



STOPPING INTERRUPTIONS

When someone interrupts another participant in your meeting, you might need to step in and take control so that the meeting doesn't lose the speaker's input & ideas. Below are a few handy expressions that tell the interrupter to be polite and wait. The first few expressions are the most polite, while the last are the most direct.

- I think it is important that everybody contributes.
- One moment, perhaps we can allow him to finish.
- I wonder if we can give her the opportunity to finish.
- Let her finish her point.
- Hold on, can we let her finish.
- Hang on, let him finish.

FINISHING YOUR POINT

It can be especially frustrating if you are the one being interrupted, but luckily there are English expressions that are ideal for that situation too. Just remember to keep your cool.

- I haven't finished what I was saying.
- No wait a moment, I haven't finished.
- Can I just finish what I was saying?
- Let me finish my thought
- As I was saying...
- As I was trying to say ...

INTERRUPTING

In general, interrupting is a no-no, but sometimes you need to step in to redirect the discussion, correct a mistake, or give information that is needed at that point. If you absolutely need to interrupt, you can be more polite by using one of these expressions to start.

- Sorry, can I interrupt?
- Can I just say something here?
- I apologise for interrupting, but you should be aware that.....

DEALING WITH DOMINANT PEOPLE

Some meeting participants are tougher to keep in line than others. For participants that regularly cross the line, try one of these:

- Thanks for your contribution, but we need consensus on this.
- I'd like to hear what other people think.
- Thank you for your comments. We'll take them into consideration.
- Remember our meeting rules, let's keep our opinions objective.
- Let's try to keep the opinions objective.
- You obviously feel strongly about this. Can you explain why?



MOVING TO THE NEXT POINT/ITEM

In those moments where you need to keep the meeting moving forward, these expressions can help you follow the agenda, stay on point, and finish on time:

- Right, I think we've covered this item on the agenda.
- The next thing to discuss is ...
- Are we finished with this item?
- Let's move onto the next item on the agenda

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE:

Joanna: Taking this data into account, we can reasonably expect sales to....

Henry: Sorry, can I interrupt? Have you considered the changing consumer habits?

Chairperson: Henry, I wonder if we can give her the opportunity to finish.

Henry: I apologise. Joanna, please continue

Joanna: Thank you. As I was saying, sales next year could increase by 15% according to this data

CLOSING A MEETING



You are now an expert at conducting a meeting in English..... almost. There is one last piece of the puzzle to consider: the ending. After you have completed the agenda, reached consensus and achieved your goals, how do you end? “goodbye” “see ya later” “the end”??? Not quite.

Here are a few English expressions that can end your meeting on a good note:

SUMMARISING

- Before we close, let me summarise the main points.
- Shall I go over the main points of the meeting?
- Okay, let's summarise
- So, to sum up...
- Let me recap

CLOSING WORDS

- We've had some great ideas
- We've made a lot of progress
- Good work everyone.
- Thank you all for your input

EXAMPLE DIALOGUE:

- Chairperson: Before we close, let me summarise the main points. We have met our sales goals for this quarter. Projections for next quarter are for a 5% increase. Jane's team will provide us with the new marketing strategy at the next meeting. Good work everyone. Thank you all for your input. We've had some great ideas and made a lot of progress. I wish you all a good day.