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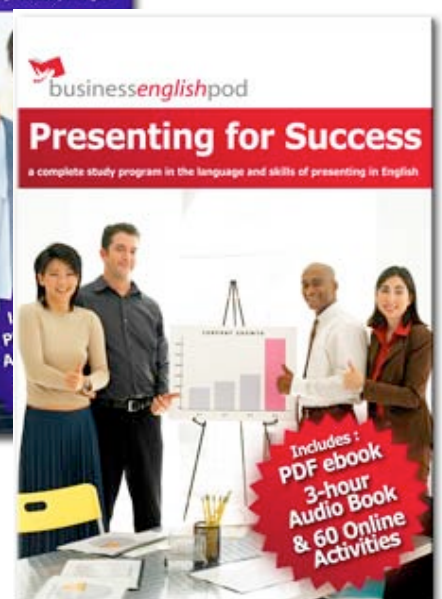
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Meeting Essentials

A Business English study guide to communicating effectively in meetings.

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Meeting Essentials

Whether you love them or hate them, meetings are part of almost every job. So performing well in meetings is a very important skill. People who can express their opinions, disagree politely, handle the discussion with skill and diplomacy – these kinds of people succeed in their careers and rise to the top in their companies.

Meetings come in many types. They include large, formal conferences, like year-end meetings, and small informal discussions, like a quick chat between team leaders and their staff. In this 14-chapter e-book on meeting skills, you will learn useful language for meetings of many different types.



First we will cover agreeing, disagreeing and expressing opinions in three chapters. The next two parts look at making, accepting, and rejecting suggestions. After that, we'll handle asking for and giving clarification, in two sections. Then we'll look at running a meeting; this includes kicking it off, managing the discussion and dealing with interruptions. Two new chapters cover problem-solving meetings. We finish off by covering language used to wrap up a meeting and state action points.

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All Business English Pod e-books come with a variety of study resources to provide learners with maximum flexibility and value.

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BEP 210 - Managing the Discussion

This is the second in a two-part series on opening and managing meetings. In the first episode, we looked at how to open a meeting. In today's podcast we're going to cover how to manage the discussion.

Martin, the GM of Daneline Singapore, is discussing with his staff how to make up a budget shortfall. He has just asked Sandra to kick off the first item on the agenda – outsourcing the cleaning.

Vocabulary

No-brainer: Something that is so obvious that you don't even have to think about it to know that it's true. Used for example in the expression, "That's a no-brainer if you ask me."

It's a little harsh: Harsh means unkind or inconsiderate. You see it for example in the expressions harsh treatment or harsh realities. For example, "If you're going to succeed in this world you have to face the harsh realities of life."

To let people go: This is a euphemism (a nice way) for saying to fire someone or to lay someone off. "Our costs are running too high – I think we're going to need to let some people go."

To prioritize sth.: To make something a priority, that is give it high importance. You usually deal with first the things that you prioritize. "We need to prioritize sales – without revenue, our business will fail."

Vendor: Another company that performs a service for your company or sells something to your company. "We have a variety of vendors to supply us with all the parts we need for manufacturing."

To cut fat: Similar to "to tighten one's belt," this is an idiom that describes measures taken to cut extra costs, which are conceived of as "fat." "All right – this operation is not running very efficiently, and we need to save money. There's a lot of fat we can cut."

Side-track: Can be used as a noun or verb. A discussion that leaves the main point. "Don't you think this is a bit of side-track? We've got a lot to cover – let's stick to the main topic of discussion."

Bread and butter: The core business area; the main way someone makes there money. "For over 100 years, selling medicines has been the bread and butter of our business. I don't see any reason to change now."



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Dialog

Martin: ...Sandra, would you please kick off?

Sandra: Well, this is a great way to cut a lot of fat. My figures show that we can save almost \$50,000 dollars with this one.

Sam: Can I just come in here? That reminds me, we really can't have pizza for lunch again. It's unhealthy.

Martin: Sorry, Sam, but I think this is a bit of a side-track. Let's try to keep to the agenda, ok? I want to get everyone out of here on time.

Sam: Of course.

Sandra: So as I was saying, outsourcing the cleaning can really save a lot of money. It's no-brainer if you ask me.

Martin: Uh huh. What do others think? Is there anything else we should consider?

Dave: Well, frankly, I think it's a little harsh to just let go people we've been working side by side with for years. And we have to think about how it will affect morale... (fade out)

Martin: Right, we seem to have dealt with the outsourcing issue. Now, let's move on to the brochures. We've budgeted \$68,500 to redesign and reprint all the sales and marketing brochures. Dave, this is your area of expertise. What do you think?

Dave: Well, obviously, if we're facing a shortfall, we need to make cuts. And this cut would be less painful than many of the others. But we really have to prioritize sales, because this is the bread and butter of our business. Perhaps we can consider a limited redesign?

Sam: I agree.

Sandra: I do too. You know, Dave, speaking of the brochure, you really consider using a different vendor for the brochures this time. I didn't think they did a good job on the last ones at all.

Dave: I'm with you 100%.

Martin: You may have a point there Sandra, but let's leave that for the regular team meeting on Thursday. We still have a lot to cover.

Sandra: Okay.

Martin: All right, can we go around the table to make sure everyone agrees? All those in favor of a limited redesign of the brochure? All those against?

Debrief

During the meeting, both Sam and Sandra attempt to change the topic. But Martin does a pretty good job of following the agenda, doesn't he? Let's study how Martin keeps the discussion on track. Along the way, we'll also look at some idioms and other useful language.

This first person to try to change the topic is Sam. Remember, Sandra is talking about how much money they can save by outsourcing cleaning.

Sandra: Well, this is a great way to cut a lot of fat. My figures show that we can save almost \$50,000 dollars with this one.

Sandra says that outsourcing is a great way "to cut a lot of fat." Similar to the phrase "to tighten one's belt," which we learned last time, "to cut a lot of fat" means to save a lot of money. This makes Sam think of food:

Sam: Can I just come in here? That reminds me, we really can't have pizza for lunch again. It's unhealthy.

It sounds as though Sam's stomach is more important to him than the budget discussions, doesn't it? Notice how Sam uses "that reminds me." This useful phrase links to what was just said to change the topic of discussion: What you said reminds me of something else.

So Sam has attempted to change the topic. How does Martin get him back on track?

Sorry, Sam, but I think this is a bit of a side-track. Let's try to keep to the agenda, ok? I want to get everyone out of here on time.

Martin uses the phrase "I think this is a bit of a side-track" to show that he feels the group has gone off the main topic on to an unimportant side issue. He is careful to emphasize the benefit to the group of keeping to the agenda by saying "I want to get everyone out of here on time," that is he wants everyone to be able to leave on time. Martin's skillful action guides the discussion back on track.

Returning to the topic gives Sandra a chance to finish what she was saying:

So as I was saying, outsourcing the cleaning can really save a lot of money. It's no-brainer if you ask me.

"So as I was saying," lets Sandra continue from where she was interrupted. How does she feel about outsourcing? She strongly supports it, saying that it's a "no-brainer." That means it's so obvious that you don't need a brain to figure it out.

Later on in the discussion, Sandra also tries to change the topic. Remember, Dave has proposed a limited or partial redesign of the brochure: He is against totally abandoning the brochure project because sales should be prioritized, meaning that

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this should be given high importance. He says sales are the “bread and butter” of the business. This is an idiom that means something is very important to the business’ profit. Dave’s proposal reminds Sandra of a point she’d like to make. Let’s listen.

Dave: Perhaps we can consider a limited redesign?

Sam: I agree.

Sandra: I do to. You know, Dave, speaking of the brochure, you really should consider using a different vendor for the brochures this time.

Similar to Sam’s “That reminds me...,” Sandra uses “Speaking of the brochure” to change the topic. This kind of expression is particularly useful in informal discussions or when socializing and making small talk. We’ll be looking in more detail at ways to change the topic during later episodes on social English.

Now, let’s listen to how Martin gets the discussion back on track this time.

Martin: You may have a point there Sandra, but let’s leave that for the regular team meeting on Thursday. We still have a lot to cover.

In this expression and in Martin’s previous suggestion that “This is a bit of a side-track,” notice the strong journey metaphor. “Metaphor” means to describe something in terms of something else. In this case, we understand discussions in terms of a journey with a goal: The meeting participants are travelers who have to keep to or follow the agenda, which is the road.

With the journey metaphor in mind, let’s review the language for keeping the discussion on track:

- I can see what you’re saying, but let’s try to keep to the agenda.
- To save time, we need to stay on track. Let’s try not to get too far off topic.
- Let’s get back to that later. For now, I really want to stick to the agenda.
- That’s an interesting point, but let’s talk about that when we come to it. Can we get back to the main point?
- We’ve got a lot of ground to cover, so I suggest do our best to stay on track.

So far you’ve covered language for changing the topic and sticking to the agenda. Now let’s look at some language for widening the discussion to make sure you’ve heard different points of view. Remember earlier when Sandra says that outsourcing cleaning is a no-brainer? What does Martin say to bring other people into the discussion?

Martin: Uh huh. What do others think? Is there anything else we should consider?

“What do others think?” is an effective way to widen the discussion to include more people. What are some other phrases Martin could use?

- What other approaches are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?

- How about other people? Any comments?
- Let's go around the table and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?
- Are there any other ways to think about this?

Great. We've covered changing the topic, sticking to the agenda and widening the discussion. Now let's study how Martin moves from one point to the next in the meeting. What does he say after the team has finished talking about outsourcing?

Right, we seem to have dealt with the outsourcing issue. Now, let's move on to the brochures.

Similar to making a transition in a presentation, Martin signals that the last part has finished and the new part is beginning. Let's listen to some more language for doing just that.

- Good. I'd say that's about all for that topic. Now, let's turn to the issue of sales.
- Well, we've just about covered the San Francisco office. Let's continue by discussing Buenos Aires.
- Time is pressing. Let's leave that there and move on to the next point on the agenda, okay?

Take note of the professional way Martin asks Dave about his opinion on the next topic: He says, "Dave, this is your area of expertise. What do you think?" For a more complete review of other ways to ask for and give opinions, you can go back to BEP27. In addition, agreeing and disagreeing are covered in BEP28 and 29.

Great. There is one last topic to cover in today's episode: Checking everyone agrees in order to reach a decision. Listen to what Martin says at the end of the dialogue.

All right, can we go around the table to make sure everyone agrees? All those in favor of a limited redesign of the brochure? All those against?

"To go around the table" means to take a vote. You can either run through the participants one by one or, as Martin does, have them respond as a group by asking "All those in favor?" and "All those against?"

What are some other ways to check if everyone agrees?

- Can I get a quick show of hands? All those in favor?
- Let's take a vote. How many people are for this idea? Against? Thanks.
- Just quickly - is there anyone else that supports the strategy of reducing overhead? Please raise your hands.

Now it's your turn to practice. We're going to study keeping the discussion on track and including other people in the discussion.

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Practice 1

First, imagine you are chairing a meeting a Daneline about how to deal with a budget shortfall. You are talking about the first item on the agenda, outsourcing the cleaning, but members of your team Pat and Brooks keep changing the topic. After each beep, use a phrase we've studied to keep the discussion on track, for example:

- "I can see what you're saying, but let's try to keep to the agenda."
- or "To save time, we need to stay on track. Let's try not to get too far off topic."

Are you ready? Let's give it a try.

Cue 1 - Pat: That reminds me – can we go out for lunch today? I'd love to try the new Chinese restaurant.

Learner: _____

Cue 2 - Brooks: Can I come in here? Actually, I really think canceling the Christmas party is the best way to save money.

Learner: _____

Cue 3 - Pat: Can I ask a question? Who is going to handle the new employee training?

Learner: _____

How did you do? Listen to the example answers.

Answer 1

Cue 1 Pat: That reminds me – can we go out for lunch today? I'd love to try the new Chinese restaurant.

Answer: Can we talk about that later? We've got a lot of ground to cover.

Answer 2

Cue 2 Brooks: Can I come in here? Actually, I really think canceling the Christmas party is the best way to save money.

Answer: That's an interesting point, but let's talk about that when we come to it.

Answer 3

Cue 3 Pat: Can I ask a question? Who is going to handle the new employee training?

Answer: To save time, we need to stay focused. Let's stick to the agenda.

Be sure to go back and try the practice again. Substitute different language to build up fluency.

Let's turn now to including more people in the discussion. In a moment, you'll hear Pat and Brooks state their opinions. After each beep, use a phrase to widen the discussion, such as "What do others think?" or "Let's go around the table to get comments."

Are you ready? Give it a try.

Cue 1: We'll, in my opinion, outsourcing cleaning is a great way to save money.

Learner: _____

Cue 2: The best approach, in my view, is a limited redesign of the brochure.

Learner: _____

Cue 3: Another way to save money would be to cancel the Christmas party.

Learner: _____

Good. Now listen to some example answers.

Cue 1: We'll, in my opinion, outsourcing cleaning is a great way to save money.

Answer: How about other people – any comments?

Cue 2: The best approach, in my view, is a limited redesign of the brochure.

Answer: What other approaches are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?

Cue 3: Another way to save money would be to cancel the Christmas party.

Answer: Hmmmm. Let's go around the table and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?

That's about it for today's episode on controlling the discussion. You've learned how to return to the main point, change the topic, move on to the next point in the agenda, widen the discussion and check if everyone agrees. In addition, we've covered several useful idioms and we've looked at how the 'discussion-is-a-journey' metaphor plays an important role in the language that we use to manage meetings.

Thanks for listening!

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **FLASH** version:



Language Review

A. Metaphor

As you're learning English, thinking about metaphor can help your memory and contribute to your fluency, especially with idioms. For example, in the two episodes on opening and managing meetings, we have learned "to tighten one's belt" and "to cut the fat": In both these idioms "fat" refers to money that can be saved. In fact, language is full of metaphors. It seems we understand almost everything in terms of something else. Can you think of more? How about time is money—"We need to save time"—business is war—"They attacked our market position"—and so on. Are these the same in your native language? Many of them probably are, but you might find some that are not. This can be an interesting way to understand differences between cultures.

A. Discussion is a journey

C. Business is war

B. Fat is extra costs

D. Time is money

- 1) I don't think we're getting anywhere. Can we try another approach?
- 2) Within two years we hope to totally conquer this market
- 3) I hate to say it, but it's belt tightening time.
- 4) I feel like we're just going around in circles.
- 5) Our CEO is a real fat cat. He doesn't think twice about spending \$600 on a bottle of wine for dinner.
- 6) I'm sorry—I just can't spare the time at the moment.
- 7) For now I think the best thing we can do is get out of this market and keep our heads low in order to cut our losses.
- 8) Time is precious. Make sure you treasure every second.

A. Discussion is a journey

B. General Review

Part 1: Key Phrases

Review key phrases by filling in the blanks with words from the box.

issue	about	raise	comments	next
against	covered	table	quick	approaches

Widening the discussion to include more people:

- 1) What other _____ are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?
- 2) How about other people? Any _____?
- 3) Let's go around the _____ and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?
- 4) Are there any other ways to think _____ this?

Moving to a new topic:

- 5) Good. I'd say that's about all for that topic. Now, let's turn to the _____ of sales.
- 6) Well, we've just about _____ the San Francisco office. Let's continue by discussing Buenos Aires.
- 7) Time is pressing. Let's leave that there and move on to the _____ point on the agenda, okay?

To check if everyone agrees:

- 8) Can I get a _____ show of hands. All those in favor?
- 9) Let's take a vote. How many people are for this idea? _____? Thanks.
- 10) Just quickly—is there anyone else that supports the strategy of reducing overhead. Please _____ your hands.

Part 2: Sticking to the Agenda

Allan keeps leading the discussion astray. Bill would like to get him back on track, but he keeps getting his sentences mixed up. Help Bill by putting his sentences back in order.

Allan: That reminds me – can we go out for lunch today? I'd love to try the new Chinese restaurant.

Bill: 1) can that we about talk later 2) got we've a lot to ground cover of
Can _____

Allan: Can I come in here? Actually, I really think canceling the Christmas party is the best way to save money.

Bill: That's an interesting point, 3) let's talk but that when we to come about it

Allan: Can I ask a question? Who is going to handle the new employee training?

Bill: To save time, 4) need we to focused stay 5) 's stick let agenda to the

Answers

Language Review

A. Metaphor

2) C 3) B 4) A 5) B 6) D 7) C 8) D.

B. General Review

Part 1: Key Phrases

Widening the discussion to include more people:

- 1) What other **approaches** are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?
- 2) How about other people? Any **comments**?
- 3) Let's go around the **table** and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?
- 4) Are there any other ways to think **about** this?

Moving to a new topic:

- 5) Good. I'd say that's about all for that topic. Now, let's turn to the **issue** of sales.
- 6) Well, we've just about **covered** the San Francisco office. Let's continue by discussing Buenos Aires.
- 7) Time is pressing. Let's leave that there and move on to the **next** point on the agenda, okay?

To check if everyone agrees:

- 8) Can I get a **quick** show of hands. All those in favor?
- 9) Let's take a vote. How many people are for this idea? **Against**? Thanks.
- 10) Just quickly—is there anyone else that supports the strategy of reducing overhead. Please **raise** your hands.

Part 2: Sticking to the Agenda

Allan: That reminds me – can we go out for lunch today? I'd love to try the new Chinese restaurant.

Bill: 1) Can we talk about that later? 2) We've got a lot of ground to cover.

Allan: Can I come in here? Actually, I really think canceling the Christmas party is the best way to save money.

Bill: That's an interesting point, 3) but let's talk about that when we come to it.

Allan: Can I ask a question? Who is going to handle the new employee training?

Bill: To save time, 4) we need to stay focused. Let's stick to the agenda.

Online Practice

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