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a business English study guide to communicating effectively in meetings



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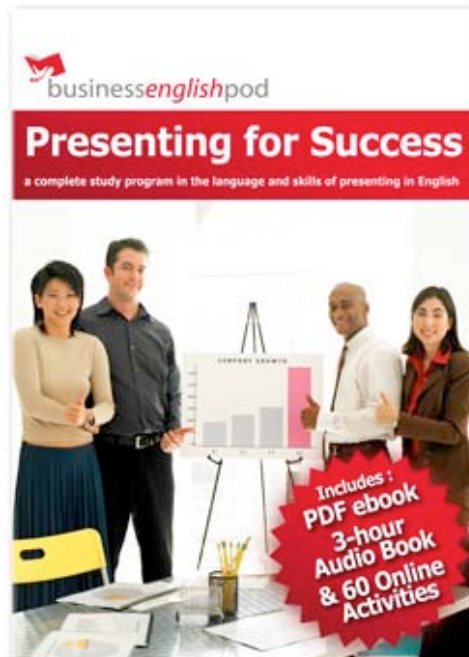
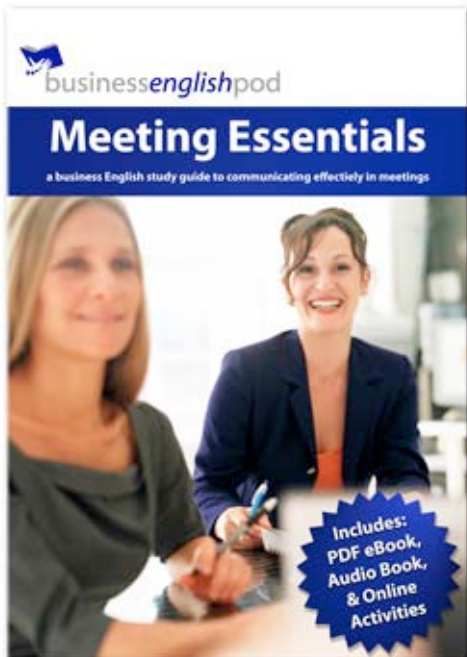
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Meeting Essentials

This is an e-book brought to you by Business English Pod, the leading provider of on-demand audio and study tools for business English communication skills, on the Web at www.businessenglishpod.com. My name is Clayton and I'll be your host for this series.

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 12-chapter e-book on meeting skills, we will learn useful language for meetings of many different types. The goal is to study all the essentials you need for participating actively in, and, when required, leading and managing the discussion.

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. Finally, in the last four chapters, we'll look at running a meeting; this includes kicking it off, managing the discussion, dealing with interruptions, and finishing up.



In all, this e-book has over four hours of information-packed audio lessons. The accompanying study notes contain a complete transcript of every chapter, vocabulary definitions, extra practice questions, and study strategies. And you can access a wide variety of additional listening and language development exercises on the website, at www.businessenglishpod.com.

In each chapter, I will introduce the topic, then play a dialog that demonstrates the key concepts. Afterwards, in the "debrief" section, I'll take you through the main points and explain important vocabulary and idioms. For each skill, we'll learn more phrases that you can use. Then, finally, in the practice section of each debrief, you will have the opportunity to use some of the language you learned.

Learners often ask me how to study more efficiently and effectively. I have some suggestions. Listen to each chapter and practice the example phrases multiple times. First listen without the transcript; then, when you have time, go back and listen again with the transcript. Underline and look up words you don't

understand. It's important to study vocabulary in context: Pay attention to collocations, or word partnerships, and words in whole sentences, with their accompanying prepositions and other grammatical characteristics.

Do the practice section of each debrief at least a couple times; try substituting different language the second time you practice. Substitution helps you increase your fluency, that is, your ability to say the same thing in many ways. You can also record yourself, write and act out dialogs, and practice together with a learning partner. These and many more strategies are covered in the study notes for each chapter.

Meeting Essentials is targeted for intermediate learners at or around the [Common European Framework \(CEF\)](#) level B2. This corresponds to a BULATS score of 3 or higher or an IELTS score of 5 or higher. The materials are designed, however, to be useful to students at a variety of levels: Intermediate learners will focus initially on language development whereas upper-intermediate and more advanced learners can zoom in on skills development, high-level vocabulary, fluency, confidence and enhancement of overall professionalism.

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What's Included?

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

You can access and download all the materials for this e-book on this webpage:

<http://www.businessenglishpod.com/learningcenter2/ebooks/meeting-essentials/>

Each e-book includes the following resources:



Podcasts

MP3 lessons you can listen to on your computer, MP3 player or mobile phone.



Study Notes

PDF lesson transcripts with extra vocabulary and language exercises.



PhraseCasts

Compact MP3's of just the dialog, phrases and speaking practice.



Online Activities

Interactive quizzes, listening and language review exercises.

Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions

In this Business English Pod episode, we'll be looking at ways to give and ask for opinions. We'll be looking both at more formal (or careful) language as well as at more informal (or direct) language.

Giving and asking for opinions is a very important part of meetings and discussions of all types.

First let's listen to a more formal situation. We'll be listening to part of a meeting at DigiSoft, a multinational software company. Sheila, a vice president, is talking to Walt, George and Bruce, three software engineers, about the deadline for the new software release. Release here means launch: That is, bring the product onto the market.

Vocabulary

Launch: To release a product onto the market. "Last April we launched the new version of our software onto the market."

Bugs: Problems with computer software. "There are a few bugs with the system, so we are going to have to do a slight redesign."

Rub it in: To remind someone on purpose of something that is uncomfortable or painful. "Every time I make a mistake, she just loves to rub it in."

Overtime: Extra hours spent working. "Anything over 40 hours per week is considered working overtime here."

To burn the midnight oil: To work late into the night. "I had to burn the midnight oil to get the product done."

Deficiencies: Weaknesses. "The product has a few obvious deficiencies."

Essential: Very important. "It's absolutely essential that we consider a different approach to this task."



Dialogs

Dialog 1: Formal/Careful

Sheila: So, let's move on to the topic of release date. Gentlemen, when do you think we will be able to launch this product? Walt?

Walt: Well, I tend to feel that... we should probably be able to start testing the product in April. That means that if all goes well, we can have a first release in May or June.

Sheila: I see. Thank you Walt. What's your reaction to that Bruce?

Bruce: May or June...Well, from my point of view...that sounds about right.

George: Excuse me, may I come in here? I wonder if I could say something?

Sheila: Go ahead, George. What would you like to add?

George: Well, it seems to me that May is much, much too early. Actually, we are still have some pretty major problems with bugs in the update engine, and I just don't see how we will be able to...

Dialog 2 – Informal

Ok, now let's listen to George, Bruce and Walt walk into the break room right after the meeting. Sheila, their boss, is not here; this is a more informal situation.

Bruce: Hey guys, did you see the Chelsea/Liverpool game last night? What did you think, Walt? Quite a game, huh? Chelsea looked pretty good!

Walt: You always have to rub it in, don't you Bruce. You know I'm a Liverpool fan.

Bruce: How about you, George?

George: Actually, that was one of the greatest games I've ever seen. But the way you guys keep telling the boss we can finish the product by May, none of us are going to have time to watch any more football games. We're all going to be working overtime every night, burning the midnight oil!

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Debrief

So now you've heard both formal or informal. Let's look at the formal conversation. How does Sheila ask for her employees' opinions?

Sheila is in charge. She is the boss and the chairperson of the meeting. One way for her to ask for an employee's opinion is simply to say his name with a rising intonation or tone.

Sheila: ... Gentlemen, when do you think we will be able to launch this product? Walt?

Sheila also uses some other ways to ask for her employees' opinions. All these ways are relatively formal. They signal that this is a formal meeting. She says

Sheila: I see. Thank you Walt. What's your reaction to that Bruce?

And

Sheila: Go ahead, George. What would you like to add?

Together with these speakers, try some other formal phrases for asking for an opinion:

- How do you feel about that, Cecilia?
- Could you please share your thoughts on that, Sam?
- What's your view on this, Richard?
- Tony, what's your feelings on this?

Now, let's look at the language Walt, Bruce and George use to express their opinions in a formal situation. Walt says...

Walt: Well, I tend to feel that we should be able to start testing the product in April...

This language—"I tend to feel that"—shows a careful, formal tone. Walt uses this tone because he is talking to his boss, and perhaps because he is not sure whether or not the others will agree with him.

Let's keep listening.

Sheila: I see. Thank you Walt. What's your reaction to that Bruce?

Bruce: May or June...Well, from my point of view...that sounds about right.

Bruce likewise uses more formal, careful language—"Well, from my point of view." This makes him sound more polite, since he is talking to his boss. In addition, it gives him time to think. Giving yourself time to think is another reason to use these phrases.

How about George? How did he offer his opinion?

George: ... I wonder if I could say something?

Sheila: Go ahead, George. What would you like to add?

George: Well, it seems to me that May is much, much too early.

Think about the ways that George uses to express his opinion—"I wonder if I could say something," and "Well, it seems to me that...." These ways expression are also quite careful. George has a good reason to be careful, doesn't he? He disagrees with his colleagues.

Now lets practice some further formal (or careful) phrases for expressing your opinion:

- I have the impression that...he didn't really want to come.
- Don't you think that that's a little early.
- I tend to feel it's a bit too early to start.

Next, Let's turn to the more informal discussion between Walt, Bruce and George. Remember, they are in the break room right after the meeting. Bruce asks George and Walt

Bruce: Hey guys, did you see the Chelsea/Liverpool game last night? What did you think, Walt? Quite a game, huh? Chelsea looked pretty good!

This is an informal, relaxed discussion among colleagues. You can tell it's informal because Bruce uses the informal word "guys" to address George and Walt. Also, he says "What do you think?" This is an informal way to ask for an opinion. Walt says:

Walt: You always have to rub it in, don't you Bruce. You know I'm a Liverpool fan.

"To rub something in" is an idiom. It means to remind someone on purpose of something that is uncomfortable or painful. Here, it is done as a joke. It sounds like Walt is a Liverpool fan and he is unhappy because Chelsea won the game.

Let's keep listening.

Bruce: How about you, George?

George: Actually, that was one of the greatest games I've ever seen.

"How about you?" is another direct way to ask for an opinion.

Next, notice how George starts his sentence with "actually." "Actually" is a direct or informal way to state an opinion. It shows us that George has something new or surprising to say. With George, practice more direct ways to state an opinion:

- The point is...we're doing very well in this market.
- The way I see it, we're heading for trouble.
- Obviously, there's only one choice
- Basically, I think we have two options.

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Finally, let's listen to the end of the dialogue again.

Bruce: How about you, George?

George: Actually, that was one of the greatest games I've ever seen. But the way you guys keep telling the boss we can finish the product by May, none of us are going to have time to watch any more football games.

George means that if Bruce and Walt keep telling the boss that they can meet the May deadline, everyone is going to have to work very hard; in fact, they are going to have to work so hard that they won't have time to watch any football games. Listen to some more examples of this sentence pattern:

The way you are always looking at her, she's going to think you have fallen in love with her. This means, "Because you are looking at her very often, she will think that you have fallen in love with her."

The way we are working, we're never going to finish the project in time.

This means, "If we keep working this slowly, we will not be able to finish the project on time."

One last time, let's listen to the final part of the dialogue again.

George: ... We're all going to be working overtime every night, burning the midnight oil!

"To burn the midnight oil" is an idiom. It means to work hard, or to work late into the night, until past midnight. Because it is dark, you have to burn a candle or a light, thus you have to burn the midnight oil.

Now, let's practice what we've learned today.

First, we'll try using the formal phrases we learned today for expressing an opinion. Imagine you are leading a meeting at your company. In the prompt, you'll hear the name of one of your employees, and a topic. After the beep, use some of the phrases you have learned today to ask for his or her opinion about that topic. For example, if you hear, "Sheila, stock price" you can say, "How do you feel about the stock price, Sheila?" Let's give it a try.

1) **Prompt:** "George, new product launch"

Learner: _____

2) **Prompt:** "Jenny, sales performance"

Learner: _____

3) **Prompt:** "Max, employee turnover issue"

Learner: _____

Now, listen to some possible answers.

- 1) **Prompt:** "George, new product launch"
Learner: Could you please share your thoughts on the new product launch, George?
- 2) **Prompt:** "Jenny, sales performance"
Learner: Jenny – what's your view on the sales performance.
- 3) **Prompt:** "Max, employee turnover issue"
Learner: Max, what are your feelings on the employee turnover issue.

Good, now let's practice *giving* an opinion.

Imagine you work at DigiSoft and you are attending a meeting with you manager, Pat. First you'll hear a prompt telling you whether you should be formal and careful, or informal and direct. Then, Pat will ask a question. After the beep, respond appropriately with your own opinion. You should make up any details you need.

- 1) **Prompt:** Careful, formal. Pat: So, do you think we should release the product this month?
Learner: _____

- 2) **Prompt:** Careful, formal. Pat: What do you think of our customer's new product?
Learner: _____

- 3) **Prompt:** Direct, informal. Pat: So what should we do to increase sales?
Learner: _____

Now, listen to some example answers. Of course, your answers will be different. These are just provided for reference.

- 1) **Prompt:** Careful, formal. Pat: So, do you think we should release the product this month?
Learner: Hmm. Don't you think that's a little early? I tend to think we should release it next month.
- 2) **Prompt:** Careful, formal. Pat: What do you think of our customer's new product?
Learner: Well, I have the impression that it's a very good product.
- 3) **Prompt:** Direct, informal. Pat: So what should we do to increase sales?
Learner: The way I see it, we should be advertising in more places.

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How did you do? To increase fluency, try substituting different language when you practice again.

That concludes this episode. We've practiced formal and informal ways of giving and asking for opinions. Don't miss the online exercises for this and the other chapters at www.businessenglishpod.com. There you'll find lots of extra listening, language and vocabulary practice.

In the next chapter, we will be looking at ways of agreeing and disagreeing in meetings and discussions.



Language Review

A. Jumbled Sentences

Rearrange the jumbled sentences to make phrases you can use to ask or state an opinion:

1) what's that reaction to your Bruce
2) Simon comments any
3) the impression I have that
4) as I am concerned as far
5) my view of point from

B. Review of Key Language

To review important language and phrases, fill in the blanks with language from the box. Then, in the space provided after each sentence, indicate whether it is for ASKING for an opinion for EXPRESSING an opinion. If it is the later, indicate whether it is FORMAL (careful/indirect) or INFORMAL (direct). The first one has been done for you.

don't	point	views
share	obviously	way
impression	tend	feelings
basically		

- 1) How do you feel about that, Cecilia? Asking
- 2) Could you please _____ your thoughts on that, Sarah? _____
- 3) What's your _____ on this, Richard? _____
- 4) Frank, what's your _____ on this? _____
- 5) I have the _____ that...he didn't really want to come. _____
- 6) _____ you think that that's a little early. _____
- 7) I _____ to feel it's a bit too early to start. _____
- 8) The _____ is...we're doing very well in this market. _____
- 9) The _____ I see it, we're heading for trouble. _____
- 10) _____, there's only one choice _____
- 11) _____, I think we have two options. _____

Study Strategy

What topics do you like to talk about? Sports? Stock market? Culture? Film? Write down five questions that you find interesting, then practice answering them. You can also practice role playing with a friend. Make a conscious effort to use the phrases we've practiced in this episode.

Answers

Language Review

A. Jumbled sentences

- 1) What's your reaction to that Bruce?
- 2) Any comments Simon
- 3) My impression is that
- 4) As far as I am concerned
- 5) From my point of view

B. Review of Key Language

1-4 are ASKING for an opinion; 4-7 are FORMAL (careful/indirect) phrases for EXPRESSING an opinion; 8-11 are INFORMAL (direct) phrases for EXPRESSING an opinion.

- 1) How do you **feel** about that, Cecilia?
- 2) Could you please **share** your thoughts on that, Sam?
- 3) What's your **view** on this, Richard?
- 4) Tony, what's your **feelings** on this?
- 5) I have the **impression** that...he didn't really want to come.
- 6) **Don't** you think that that's a little early.
- 7) I **tend** to feel it's a bit too early to start.
- 8) The **point** is...we're doing very well in this market.
- 9) The **way** I see it, we're heading for trouble.
- 10) **Obviously**, there's only one choice
- 11) **Basically**, I think we have two options.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Quiz](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Gap-fill 1 \(Formal\)](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Gap-fill 2 \(Informal\)](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Dialog & Vocabulary 1 \(Formal\)](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Dialog & Vocabulary 2 \(Informal\)](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Language Review 1](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Language Review 2](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Language Review 3](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Language Review 4](#)

[Unit 202 – Expressing Opinions - Vocabulary Flashcards](#)