

Longman Business English Skills

Meetings and discussions


H31-44

027



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Series editors
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INTRODUCTION TO THE LEARNER

Meetings and discussions is part of the Longman Business Skills series. It presents and practises the language used by people in business meetings and discussions. The book consists of extracts from company business meetings where three to five people are involved, both native and non-native speakers. All of the subjects discussed are controversial ones that give rise to different opinions, and the full range of argumentation language is presented. Practice in using this language follows each extract.

Objectives

The aim of this book is

- to help you recognize the way arguments and opinions can be built up for use in discussions.
- to improve your listening skills in this area.
- to help you build up your own ability to present and argue points of view in discussions.

Contents

The book consists of eight units. Each unit covers a different aspect of the language of meetings, ranging from starting a meeting, presenting and supporting opinions, to summarizing and concluding. Each unit consists of extracts of meetings on cassette, followed by questions that check comprehension and focus attention on particular language features. Then comes presentation of the main language points in the unit, followed by practice activities of both a closed and open-ended style. All of these practice activities are on the cassette.

Using the book

The units can be used in sequence, to build up the full range of discussion skills, or in isolation if you want to concentrate on only one aspect, eg *making suggestions*. There is no continuous storyline running through the book, although the same basic situation reappears in each block of two units.


THE LISTENING PHASE

This covers the first three parts of each unit – **Comprehension Check**, **Focus on Language**, and **Focus on Intention**. It involves listening several times to the extract of a meeting, each time for a different purpose. The aim is to develop your recognition of the language used in argumentation.

LANGUAGE SUMMARIES

These follow the listening phase, and are clear presentations of the main kind of language relevant to that unit, eg *to accept ideas and proposals, to support an argument*.

PRACTICES

These follow each language summary. They are designed to activate and practise the language presented in the unit. This is mainly done on cassette, where you have to expand some notes into a short argument to support an opinion or to reject a proposal. . . . etc. You then compare your version with the model version on the tape. All material on cassette is marked  in the book. Some of these practice activities are very controlled, and in that case your version should be similar to the model version. Other activities are very open-ended, and you have to develop your own opinions about a point. In this case your version could be very different from the model version. The model version is only ever a suggestion – there will always be other ways to say the same thing. If your version is different it will not be wrong if it has the same style and form as the model version.

Working alone

If you are using this book by yourself, try to record your versions of the practice activities on cassette. If this is difficult to do, say them aloud and then write them down so that you can compare them with the model versions later. Each question in the book, from the comprehension check to the practice activities, has an answer in the key. All of the model versions of the practice activities are on cassette, as well as written out in the key.

Working with a teacher

If you can practise the activities with a teacher and other friends and colleagues, you will be able to have more realistic short discussions and exchanges of opinion in the practice activities. It will be less necessary to record your versions and to use the key.

1 Starting and controlling meetings



Aims

This unit looks at the language used by the person chairing a meeting or discussion

- to open the discussion and introduce the items to be discussed
- to summarize the main facts of a case

Background

Six months ago *flexitime* was introduced in the administrative and personnel departments of INCA, the UK subsidiary of an American engineering company which produces lifts. Initially, the scheme seemed to be very successful and extremely popular in both departments. But now the employees in the production departments are beginning to object and demand a similar system for themselves. One department has just started a ban on all overtime as a protest. The company is especially keen to avoid any further confrontation as order books are full and there is the chance of a major contract with the Middle East.

**Comprehension Check**

Listen to this extract from a meeting held to discuss this problem. Taking part in the meeting, in order of speaking, are:

Managing Director, Graham Burns.
Production Manager, Bob Clark.
Personnel Manager, Anne Byron.

Decide if the following statements are **true** or **false**.

- 1 The company is about to launch a new product.
- 2 The Managing Director, who speaks first, wants to introduce flexitime for all departments in the company.
- 3 The Production Manager, who speaks second, also wants his people to have flexitime.
- 4 Everyone in the company works forty hours a week.
- 5 The Personnel Manager agrees to stop the flexitime arrangement in her department.

Check your
answers in the key.

**Focus on Language**

Listen to the extract again and answer the following questions about the language used.

- 1 What words does the Managing Director use to open the meeting?
- 2 Before stating the objectives of the meeting he summarizes the background to the problem which they are all familiar with. What words does he use to introduce this summary?
- 3 There are two objectives to the meeting:
 - to look into ways of avoiding any further industrial action.
 - to review the whole situation regarding flexitime.

1 Starting and controlling meetings

What phrase does he use to introduce the two objectives?
Complete the sentence:

_____ firstly to ... and secondly to ...

- 4 After opening the meeting he directs the meeting to the Production Manager, Bob Clark. What exactly does he say?

_____, Bob _____

- 5 When the Production Manager suggests that office workers do exactly as they please, the Personnel Manager interrupts suddenly. What expression does she use to do this?

- 6 The Managing Director then overrules the interruption. What phrase does he use? Complete the sentence:

_____, let Bob finish. ...

- 7 Near the end of the meeting the Managing Director feels that the discussion is getting away from the subject.

- a How does he state this? Complete the sentence:

Look, _____
_____ interesting but _____

- b How does he restate the main objective of the meeting? Complete the sentence:

_____ flexitime is a valid concept
_____ how we're going to avoid a strike.

Check your
answers in the key.

Focus on Intention

The full text of the extract is given below, divided into three sections. At the beginning of each section is a list of the different speakers' intentions – what each speaker is trying to do or say at each stage in the discussion, eg *open the meeting* or *present a summary of the problem*.

Match each intention with the corresponding part of the discussion. Some intentions have been marked as examples.

SECTION 1 SPEAKERS' INTENTIONS

Opens the meeting.

Directs the meeting to the first speaker.

States the objectives of the meeting.
Presents a summary of the problem.

Managing
Director

Right. Let's get started.

INTENTION

a Opens the meeting.

As you know, we're just about to launch a major new product. But yesterday I was approached by a representative of our union, demanding an introduction of flexitime for their members and threatening some kind of go-slow. One department has already banned overtime and I'm afraid that we could have a strike on our hands before long.

b _____

I've called this meeting firstly to look into ways of avoiding any further industrial action and secondly to review the whole situation regarding flexitime.

c States the objectives of the meeting.

Perhaps you'd like to start, Bob, and put us in the picture.

d _____

SECTION 2 SPEAKERS' INTENTIONS

Restates the problem.

Counters criticism by explaining the situation.

Criticizes.

Returns to the original explanation of the problem.

Interrupts to check the implications.

Interrupts to control the meeting.

INTENTION

Production
Manager

Well, Graham this morning I spent three hours with the unions and basically they want the same privileges as our administrative people. Frankly I don't blame them. They resent the fact that anybody with an office job can do exactly as they please.

a _____

Personnel
Manager

Hold on, what do you mean by that? Are you implying...

b Interrupts to check the implications.

Managing
Director

Just a minute, Anne, let Bob finish what he was saying. We'll come to your point later.

c _____

Production
Manager

Anyway, as I was saying, my people resent the fact that your department can walk in at ten in the morning when we've already done half a day's work.

d _____

We have to be in the factory at seven, but your people can do exactly what they want.

e _____

Personnel
Manager

What do you mean by that? You know very well that everybody works forty hours. The only difference is that they can come in any time between seven and ten.

f _____

SECTION 3 SPEAKERS' INTENTIONS

Explains rejection in greater detail.

Rejects a suggestion.

Claims irrelevance. (2)

Restates objectives.

Puts forward a suggestion.

Criticizes.

Managing
Director

Look, all this is very interesting but you're missing the point.

The question is not whether flexitime is a valid concept but how we're going to avoid a strike. Now let's move on.

Why can't we introduce flexitime in your production department?

Production
Manager

Well it's not that I've got anything against flexitime but you really can't introduce it at shop floor level.

We have to keep the assembly line moving at all times and it just wouldn't be possible to have people coming in when they please. The plant is old and any changes would mean extensive redesign.

Personnel
Manager

I'm sorry but that's hardly my problem.

You can't expect me to drop a system just because you can't find ways of adapting.

INTENTION

a Claims irrelevance.

b _____

c _____

d _____

e _____

f _____

g Criticizes.

Check your answers in the key.

Language Summary 1

Opening a meeting

A lot of this extract shows the Managing Director opening and directing the meeting. Some useful phrases to use here are given below.

a Starting a meeting

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I think we should begin.

Perhaps we'd better get started/get down to business.

Right then, I think it's about time we got started going.

Right then, I think we should begin.

Let's begin/get going, shall we?

Shall we start?

b Stating objectives

The purpose of this meeting is, first, to... and secondly to...

We are here today to consider firstly... secondly... thirdly.

The main objective of our meeting is...

I've called this meeting first to... secondly to...

c Keeping the meeting moving

Would you like to begin/open the discussion...?

Perhaps you'd like to explain/tell us/give us...

What do you think...?

Shall we continue then?

Let's move on.

Would you like to comment here?

What about you?



PRACTICE 1

Present the following subjects for discussion at a meeting, stating the objectives clearly. After listening to the example on the cassette, make up your own versions for the other subjects.

EXAMPLE

Background

Directive from HQ demanding 5% reduction in costs over the next six months.

Objectives

- a Identify areas of waste.
- b Come up with some suggestions concerning possible economies.

Right, let's get started. As you may know, we have received a directive from HQ in New York demanding a 5% reduction in costs over the next six months. So I've called this meeting first to identify possible areas of waste, and secondly to get some suggestions about where we should cut back.

Background

- a Takeover of the company by a big international firm who want to streamline the business.
- b Interviews have to be held for two vacant sales positions.

Objectives

- Ideas for improving efficiency in the department.
- Introduction of new technology.
- Define exactly what we are looking for.
- Draw up a shortlist of candidates.

1 Starting and controlling meetings

Compare your versions with the ones in the key. They are on the cassette.

- c A trade delegation is arriving from Japan next month.

- Agenda for the week.

- d Several complaints have been received about delivery delays.

- Programme of social events.
- Where exactly the delays happen.
- The causes.
- Solutions.

Language Summary 2

Summarizing and presenting the main facts of a case

Right at the beginning of the meeting the Managing Director, Graham Burns, summarized the background to the case. Some phrases to use here are:

As some of you probably know,

As you know,

Some months/years ago/yesterday

The situation now is



PRACTICE 2

Reorganize the information presented below and present it as if you were opening a meeting. Pick out only the facts that you think would be relevant to the objectives of the meeting.

Objective

As Personnel Manager you have called a meeting of management to discuss whether or not one of your junior executives, John Saunders, should be appointed to a more senior post in the company headquarters. The post has been advertised in the national press.

Key facts

Company policy in this multinational company is to send potential management candidates overseas for a minimum of two years to widen their experience.

- a Saunders applied for a senior post in headquarters which became vacant last month.
- b He is very competent, with excellent results after four years in the company.
- c 18 months ago you offered him an overseas posting to North Africa.
- d Six months ago you offered him a post in France.

- e He refused the posting in North Africa due to personal reasons – the ill health of his wife. He asked for a postponement of any overseas placement.
- f The Personnel Manager agreed to postpone the posting abroad.
- g Three candidates and Saunders have been interviewed but he clearly has the greatest ability.
- h Refused the posting to France, his excuse again was the ill health of his wife.

Compare your version with the one in the key. It is on the cassette.



PRACTICE 3

Reorganize the information and present it as if you were opening a meeting. Pick out only the facts that you think would be relevant to the objective of the meeting.

Objective

As the owner of a small company, you have called a meeting to discuss what to do about one of your staff. Anne Smith, who has recently expressed dissatisfaction with the job and is thinking of leaving. You are looking for suggestions to make her change her mind.

Key Facts

The company is new and small and cannot afford to give high salaries.

- a She joined the company two years ago.
- b She has worked very hard and usually produced good results.
- c You are unwilling to replace her as the company is small and very busy and you don't want to spend additional time training a replacement.
- d She knows a lot about many aspects of the company and it would take time for any new staff to obtain such a wide knowledge of the company.
- e Recently you have noticed she has been unable to meet deadlines and is generally less enthusiastic and hardworking than before.
- f Two weeks ago she came to you and presented the following complaints:
pressures too great.
job taking up too much personal time.
no time for friends or family.
working until 8 pm and some weekends.
salary not high enough.

Compare your version with the one in the key. It is on the cassette.

2 Presenting and supporting opinions



Aims

This unit looks at the language and tactics which can be used

- to ask for opinions
- to present and support opinions
- to agree and disagree

Background

After several years of low profits and intensive competition from larger chemical companies. Agrolux, a medium-sized company which produces agricultural products such as fertilizers and pesticides is facing a choice between a definitely profitable contract with the government to carry out research and develop chemical products for the Ministry of Defence, or alternatively following up some initial but successful research into ways of speeding up plant growth. The second choice, if successful, would be a major scientific breakthrough and could in the long run be very profitable for the company. The decision has been further complicated by an information leak to the press about the company's possible future involvement in the Defence sector.

**Comprehension Check**

The meeting you will hear on cassette took place after a difficult public meeting at which the company tried to explain its position. Taking part in the meeting, in order of speaking, are:

Managing Director, Nigel Scott.
Marketing Manager, John Davis.
Head of Research, Philip Lucas.
Financial Director, Helen Carlton.

Decide if the following statements are **true** or **false**.

- 1 The Marketing Manager supports the profitable government product.
- 2 There is another company which produces both types of product.
- 3 The Managing Director believes the company should not try to do too many projects at once.
- 4 The Head of Research wants to avoid the government project at all costs.
- 5 The Financial Director feels that the company's shareholders would support the more profitable choice of the government contract.

Check your answers in the key.

**Focus on Language**

Listen to the extract again and answer the following questions about the language used.

- 1 How does the Managing Director ask for the Marketing Manager's opinion at the beginning of the meeting?
What words does he use?

_____ on this government contract, John?

- 2 What word tells you that the Marketing Manager is speaking only for himself when he gives his opinion?

2 Presenting and supporting opinions

- 3 How does the Head of Research indicate his disagreement with the Marketing Manager? Is it a strong or weak disagreement?
- 4 The Managing Director then gives his opinion about getting involved in several things at once. How does he introduce this? Is it a strong or weak opinion?

_____ *rush into things.*

- 5 The Managing Director then supports his point of view with two reasons. How does he distinguish between them?

It'll mean _____ a huge injection of cash _____ a large extension of our existing research facilities.

- 6 The Managing Director then disagrees with the accusation by the Head of Research that he is afraid to take risks. What are his opening words that show he disagrees?

- 7 The Head of Research puts forward his opinion about what the company should do. How does he introduce his opinion? Is it very strong?

_____ *that's the direction we have to go in.*

- 8 Does the Financial Director agree or disagree with this statement? What does he say?

Check your
answers in the key.



Focus on Intention

The full text of the extract is given below, divided into three sections. At the beginning of each section there is a list of the different speakers' intentions – what each speaker is trying to do or say at each stage in the discussion.

Match each intention with the corresponding part of the discussion. Some intentions have been marked as examples.

SECTION 1 SPEAKERS' INTENTIONS

Disagrees.

Asks for an opinion.

Expands his point of view. (2)

Gives an opinion. (2)

Managing Director

What are your feelings on this government contract, John?

Marketing Manager

Well, personally I think we've got to avoid any contract which involves us with the Ministry of Defence.

I mean we've got to consider public opinion.

Head of Research

I disagree completely. You're being too emotional about the whole thing. We've got to look at this objectively.

As I see it, we're faced with a straight business decision.

It's a choice between immediate but short term profits with the government, and, on the other hand, developing a risky new product that may never earn the company any money.

INTENTION

a Asks for an opinion.

b _____

c _____

d Disagrees.

e _____

f _____

SECTION 2 SPEAKERS' INTENTIONS

Restates his views.

Explains his point of view.

Explains negative consequences.

Disagrees. (2)

Gives some evidence to support his case.

Criticizes.

Expresses reservation about an idea.

Financial Director

And why not both?

Take the case of Neco. They're involved in both types of business.

INTENTION

a Disagrees.

b _____