
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS

The Complete Business English Handbook

*Vocabulary · Sentence Structures · Phrasal Verbs
Emails · Meetings · Presentations · Negotiation*

*Master the language of the modern workplace
— from first email to closing the deal —*

FIRST EDITION

The Complete Business English Handbook

Vocabulary, Sentence Structures, Phrasal Verbs and More

First Edition.

This handbook is an educational reference for learners and users of business English at the intermediate to advanced level (CEFR B1–C2). The example companies, names, and figures used throughout are fictitious and are provided purely to illustrate language in use.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the language, definitions, and examples in this book. Language is living and usage varies by region, industry, and context; where British and American conventions differ, both are noted wherever practical.

You are free to use this material for personal study and professional development.

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Preface

English has become the working language of international business — the language of the meeting that decides the budget, the email that wins the client, and the interview that changes a career. Yet most of us were never taught the English that work actually requires.

Textbook English and *business* English are not the same thing. At work, it is not enough to be grammatically correct; you must be **clear, diplomatic, and persuasive**. You need to soften a refusal so it preserves a relationship, chase a late payment without causing offence, disagree in a meeting without seeming difficult, and summarise a complex report in three confident sentences. You need the right word — *revenue* or *profit*, *supplier* or *vendor* — and the right tone for the moment.

This handbook was written to teach exactly that. It brings together, in one place, the vocabulary, sentence patterns, phrasal verbs, idioms, and communication skills that working professionals use every day. Each chapter is practical and self-contained: you will find ready-to-use phrase banks, real example sentences, model emails and dialogues, side-by-side comparisons of weak and strong language, and exercises with answer keys so you can test yourself.

It does not matter whether you are an ambitious learner preparing to work internationally, a professional who wants to sound more polished and confident, or a teacher looking for dependable material. Read it from cover to cover, or open it at the chapter you need today. Either way, you are holding the language of the modern workplace — organised, explained, and ready to use.

Let's get down to business.

How to Use This Book

The handbook is designed to work both as a course you read in order and as a reference you dip into when a specific situation arises.

The three parts

- **Foundations (Chapters 1–5)** — the building blocks: register and tone, core vocabulary, sentence structures, phrasal verbs, and idioms & collocations. Start here to upgrade the raw material of everything you say and write.
- **Communication skills (Chapters 6–13)** — the language of real situations: emails, meetings, presentations, negotiation, phone and video calls, networking, reports, and job interviews.
- **Mastery & reference (Chapters 14–15 + Glossary)** — the grammar that keeps you correct, the language of numbers and data, and a quick-reference glossary of business terms.

How each chapter works

Every chapter mixes explanation with material you can use immediately. Look out for these recurring features:

PRO TIP

Practical advice that helps you sound more natural, fluent, and professional.

KEY POINT

An essential rule or distinction worth committing to memory.

WATCH OUT

A common mistake to avoid — the kind that undermines an otherwise good message.

You will also find **phrase banks** (tables of ready-made expressions organised by purpose), **model dialogues and emails**, side-by-side “**avoid / better**” comparisons, and a **practice exercise with an answer key** at the end of most chapters.

GET THE MOST FROM IT

Don't just read the phrase banks — say them aloud, and copy two or three you like into your own emails this week. Language sticks when you use it, not when you recognise it.

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Foundations of Professional English

Register, tone, formality, and the mindset of clear business communication

Before you learn a single new phrase, you need a deeper skill: the instinct to choose the right words for the right moment. The same message can land as warm, neutral, or cold depending on tiny choices you make almost automatically in your own language. This chapter gives you a system for making those choices on purpose in English, so that you sound professional, sound like yourself, and are understood the first time.

What "register" really means

In linguistics, **register** is the variety of language you use for a particular situation, relationship, and channel. It is not about being "more correct" or "more advanced." It is about being appropriate. A brilliant email written in the wrong register can damage a relationship just as easily as a grammar mistake — sometimes more, because the reader senses something is "off" without being able to say why.

Three questions decide your register in any business moment:

- **Who?** Your relationship with the reader — a close colleague, a new client, a senior director, a regulator.
- **Why?** Your purpose — to request, refuse, apologise, congratulate, escalate, or simply inform.
- **How?** The channel — a chat message, an email, a contract, a board presentation, a quick call.

The further you sit from a person socially, and the more permanent or high-stakes the channel, the more formal you generally become. A chat message to a teammate sits at one end; a clause in a signed agreement sits at the other. Most of your working day, though, happens in the wide middle: **neutral professional English** — polished but human, careful but not stiff. Learn to live there, and step up or down deliberately when the situation asks for it.

The formality spectrum

Think of formality as a dial, not a switch. The table below shows one ordinary message — declining a meeting time — at three settings. Notice that the *information* never changes. What changes is the framing, the vocabulary, and the amount of cushioning around the core point.

ONE MESSAGE, THREE REGISTERS: "I CAN'T MAKE TUESDAY; CAN WE MOVE IT?"

Register	How it sounds	When to use it
Very formal	"I am afraid I will not be able to attend on Tuesday. Would it be possible to reschedule the meeting for later in the week? Please accept my apologies for any inconvenience this may cause."	External clients, senior stakeholders, sensitive or first-contact situations.
Neutral	"Unfortunately I can't make Tuesday. Could we move the meeting to later in the week? Sorry for the short notice."	Everyday work with colleagues and familiar contacts — your default.
Informal	"Can't do Tuesday — any chance we push it to Thursday or Friday? Thanks!"	Close teammates, internal chat, people you have an easy rapport with.

THE MIRROR PRINCIPLE

When you are unsure which level to use, mirror the other person. If a client writes "Hi Sam, quick one — could you send the deck?", you can safely reply in kind. If they open with "Dear Mr Okafor, I am writing to enquire...", match that formality until they relax it first. Letting the more senior or external party set the tone is almost never wrong.

Formal and informal vocabulary pairs

Much of register lives at word level. English often keeps two words for the same idea: a short, everyday one (usually of Germanic origin) and a longer, more formal one (often from Latin or French). Neither is "better." But swapping a few

key words instantly shifts how a whole sentence feels. Keep this reference close — it is one of the fastest ways to raise the professionalism of your writing without sounding pompous.

EVERYDAY WORD → MORE FORMAL ALTERNATIVE

Everyday / informal	Formal / professional	Example in context
need	require	"We will <i>require</i> approval before proceeding."
get	receive / obtain	"Please confirm when you <i>receive</i> the files."
ask for	request	"May I <i>request</i> an extension?"
buy	purchase	"The licence was <i>purchased</i> in March."
help	assist	"I would be glad to <i>assist</i> with onboarding."
tell	inform / notify	"We will <i>inform</i> you of any changes."
show	demonstrate / indicate	"The data <i>indicates</i> a clear trend."
about	regarding / concerning	"I am writing <i>regarding</i> your invoice."
sorry	apologise / regret	"We <i>apologise</i> for the delay."
find out	determine / ascertain	"We are working to <i>determine</i> the cause."
deal with	address / handle	"I will <i>address</i> this with the team."
but	however	"The plan is sound; <i>however</i> , the timing is tight."
so	therefore / consequently	"Costs rose; <i>therefore</i> , we adjusted the budget."
enough	sufficient	"We have <i>sufficient</i> capacity for Q3."
a lot of	considerable / significant	"This represents a <i>significant</i> opportunity."
start	commence / begin	"The trial will <i>commence</i> on Monday."
end	conclude / finalise	"We aim to <i>finalise</i> terms this week."
check	verify / review	"Please <i>verify</i> the figures before sending."
give	provide / supply	"We will <i>provide</i> a full report."
fix	resolve / rectify	"The issue has been <i>resolved</i> ."

DON'T OVER-FORMALISE

Reaching for the longer word every time backfires. "I am in receipt of your correspondence and shall endeavour to respond at the earliest possible juncture" is not impressive — it is exhausting. Use formal vocabulary as *seasoning*, not as the whole meal. One or two precise upgrades per paragraph keep you professional; ten make you sound like a parody of a lawyer.

Tone: the music behind the words

If register is which words you choose, **tone** is the attitude those words carry. Two emails can request the exact same thing while one feels collaborative and the other feels like a demand. Four levers control tone in business English.

1. Politeness through indirectness

English leans heavily on questions and modal verbs to soften requests. A bare imperative — "Send me the report" — can read as an order, even when none is intended. Turning it into a question with **could**, **would**, or **might** adds courtesy without adding length: "Could you send me the report?" The longer the request grammar, the more polite it usually sounds: "I was wondering whether you might be able to send the report" is highly deferential — useful for big asks to senior people.

2. Hedging

Hedging means adding small qualifiers that leave room for the other person and reduce the risk of sounding absolute. Words like *perhaps*, *it seems*, *I think*, *somewhat*, *a slight delay*, and *there may be* turn a confrontation into a conversation. "You are wrong" becomes "I'm not sure that's quite right." Hedging is not weakness; it is how skilled professionals disagree without burning bridges.

3. Diplomacy and positive framing

Whenever possible, say what *can* happen rather than only what cannot. Negative framing tells the reader what they have lost; positive framing redirects them to a path forward. The information is identical; the experience is not.

AVOID

- ✗ "We can't deliver this before Friday."
- ✗ "You didn't attach the file."
- ✗ "That's not my department."

BETTER

- ✓ "We'll have this ready for you by Friday."
- ✓ "It looks like the file didn't come through — could you resend it?"
- ✓ "The best person for this is Mara in Finance — I'll introduce you."

4. Softening bad news

Bad news needs a cushion before and after the blow. A reliable pattern is **buffer** → **reason** → **news** → **way forward**. Open with something neutral or appreciative, give a brief reason, deliver the news clearly (do not hide it), then offer a next step so the message ends on possibility rather than on a closed door.

A READY-MADE BAD-NEWS FRAME

"Thank you for your patience while we reviewed this (*buffer*). After weighing the available budget for this quarter (*reason*), we won't be able to take the project forward at this time (*news*). I'd be glad to revisit it in Q4 and can keep you posted as things develop (*way forward*)." Clear, honest, and humane — the reader knows exactly where they stand and still feels respected.

Directness across cultures

There is no single "correct" level of directness in global business. Communication styles vary widely. In much of Northern Europe and North America, people value getting to the point and may read heavy indirectness as evasive. In many parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, relationship and face-saving come first, and blunt messages can feel aggressive. English is the shared bridge between all of these, which means you cannot assume your own cultural default travels well.

Two practical habits protect you. First, **state your point clearly but wrap it in courtesy** — be direct about *what* you need and indirect about *how* you ask. Second, **calibrate to the individual, not the stereotype**. Notice how a specific colleague communicates and adapt to them. When in doubt across cultures, err slightly more polite and slightly more explicit: spell out next steps and deadlines, because what feels obvious to you may not be obvious to a reader in another time zone and language.

Lena: Hi Raj, the numbers in section 3 don't add up. Fix them and resend.

Raj: Of course — could you point me to the rows you mean? I want to make sure I correct the right ones.

Lena: Sorry, that came out blunter than I meant. Rows 12 to 14 — the totals look off against the summary. Would you mind taking another look when you get a chance?

Raj: No problem at all. I'll review those rows and send you an updated version this afternoon.

Lena's first line is grammatically fine but tonally sharp. Raj stays warm and asks a clarifying question rather than reacting. Lena then self-corrects and re-frames the request as a polite question — the difference between a tense exchange and a smooth one.

Concision: plain English over jargon

Clear writing is generous writing. Every extra word you make the reader process is a small tax on their attention. Wordiness usually comes from three sources: stock phrases that pad sentences, jargon that hides meaning, and turning verbs into nouns ("make a decision" instead of "decide"). The cure is to prefer the short, concrete option and to cut anything that does not earn its place.

WORDY OR JARGON-HEAVY → CONCISE

Wordy / jargon

Concise

Wordy / jargon	Concise
in order to	to
at this point in time	now
due to the fact that	because
in the event that	if
a large number of	many
in the near future	soon
with regard to / in respect of	about / on
make a decision	decide
provide assistance to	help
give consideration to	consider
in the majority of cases	usually
touch base / circle back	talk / follow up
going forward	from now on (or cut it)
leverage synergies	work together / combine strengths
at your earliest convenience	as soon as you can

PRO TIP

Before you send anything important, read it once and try to delete one word from every line without losing meaning. You almost always can. Then check for "zombie nouns" — words ending in *-tion*, *-ment*, or *-ance* that hide a perfectly good verb. "Reach a resolution on" is just "resolve." Shorter is not lazier; it is harder to write and easier to read.

Spoken versus written English

The two channels follow different rules, and mixing them up is a common source of awkwardness. Speech is fast, forgiving, and full of contractions, fillers, and incomplete sentences — and that is fine, because tone of voice carries half the meaning. Writing is slower, permanent, and stripped of that vocal cushion, so it needs more structure and clearer signposting.

- **Contractions** (*I'll*, *we're*, *don't*) are natural in speech and in neutral or informal writing such as everyday email and chat. In very formal documents — contracts, official reports, first-contact letters — write them out: *I will*, *we are*, *do not*.
- **Sentence length** can be longer in writing because the reader can re-read; in speech, keep sentences short so listeners can follow you in real time.
- **Signposting** matters more in writing: "First... Second... Finally..." and clear paragraph breaks replace the pauses and emphasis you would use aloud.
- **Fillers and vague words** ("sort of", "you know", "basically") are tolerable in speech but should be cut from writing.

The "you / we" framing

Pronouns quietly shape relationships. **You** puts the focus on the reader and works beautifully for benefits and offers ("You'll save two hours a week"). But aimed at problems, "you" can sound accusatory ("You forgot to..."). **We** signals partnership and shared ownership ("Let's see how we can fix this"). And the passive voice or a neutral subject can take the heat out of a mistake entirely ("The order wasn't processed" rather than "You didn't process the order"). Choose the pronoun that matches the feeling you want to create, not just the grammar.

Common mistakes professionals make

AVOID

- ✗ "Revert back to me." (redundant — *revert* already means reply, and is itself overused)
- ✗ "Please do the needful." (unclear and dated in international English)
- ✗ "I want you to send the report by 5." (sounds like an order to a peer)
- ✗ "Kindly find attached herewith the document." (cluttered, archaic)

BETTER

- ✓ "Could you get back to me when you have a moment?"
- ✓ "Could you complete the steps we discussed and let me know?"
- ✓ "Could you send the report by 5 today? Thanks."
- ✓ "I've attached the document — let me know if anything's unclear."

Other frequent traps: over-apologising ("Sorry to bother you, so sorry, apologies again") dilutes your message and your authority — apologise once and move on. Exclamation marks multiply quickly in chat; one conveys warmth, three convey anxiety. And capital letters for emphasis READ AS SHOUTING — use them sparingly, if at all.

PRACTICE

Rewrite each informal line as clear, neutral-professional English suitable for a work email to a colleague you don't know well. Aim for polite, concise, and warm.

1. "Gimme the figures asap."
2. "No way we can do that by Monday."
3. "You messed up the invoice again."
4. "Wanna jump on a call later?"
5. "Thx but not interested."
6. "Pls fix and send back, it's wrong."

ANSWER KEY

Model answers — yours may differ; check that they are polite, clear, and concise:

1. "Could you send me the figures when you get a chance? They're a bit time-sensitive, so today would be ideal if possible."
2. "Unfortunately Monday won't be feasible for us. Could we aim for Wednesday instead? I'm happy to discuss the timeline."
3. "It looks like there may be an error on the invoice again — could we take another look together? I want to make sure we get it right."
4. "Would you have time for a quick call later today? Let me know what works for you."
5. "Thank you for thinking of us. This isn't the right fit for us at the moment, but I appreciate the offer."
6. "There seem to be a few issues with this version — would you mind reviewing it and sending an updated copy? Happy to clarify if helpful."

Bringing it together

Professional English is less about a bigger vocabulary than about deliberate choices: reading the situation, picking a register, setting the tone, and cutting until only the useful words remain. Master the neutral-professional middle, learn to dial up the formality for high-stakes moments and dial it down for trusted colleagues, frame the positive, soften the negative, and respect the reader's time. Do that consistently and you will sound exactly as you want to: clear, credible, and unmistakably human. The chapters ahead build on this foundation — emails, meetings, negotiations, and presentations are all just this same toolkit, applied.

Core Business Vocabulary by Theme

The essential words and collocations of finance, marketing, HR, operations, and sales

Every profession has its own dialect, and business English is no exception. Whether you are reviewing a quarterly report in Frankfurt, pitching to a client in Singapore, or negotiating a supplier contract over email, the same few hundred words appear again and again. Master them and you sound credible; confuse them and you risk looking like an outsider. This chapter groups the most useful terms into five themes — Finance & Accounting, Marketing & Sales, Human Resources, Operations & Supply Chain, and Management & Strategy. For each, you will find a reference table of terms with plain-English meanings and natural example sentences, plus callouts that untangle the words people most often mix up. The goal is not to memorise definitions in isolation but to learn each word inside the phrases and collocations where it actually lives, so that the vocabulary becomes active rather than passive.

1. Finance & Accounting

Finance is the language of the boardroom because, ultimately, every decision is judged by its effect on the numbers. You do not need to be an accountant to take part in these conversations, but you do need to understand the difference between money coming in, money going out, and money kept. The terms below are the foundation. Notice how often they combine into fixed phrases: you *generate revenue*, *cut overheads*, *stay within budget*, and *break even* before you ever *turn a profit*.

KEY TERMS IN FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
revenue	The total money a company earns from sales before any costs are deducted; also called the "top line".	The company generated record revenue of forty million dollars last year, driven mainly by its software division.
turnover	(British usage) Total sales over a period — a close synonym of revenue; (separately) the rate at which staff leave or stock is sold.	Annual turnover rose by twelve percent, putting the firm among the fastest-growing in its sector.
margin	The percentage of revenue left as profit after costs; a measure of how profitable each sale is.	We sell at high volume but on a thin margin, so even a small price cut hurts us.
overheads	The ongoing running costs of a business — rent, salaries, utilities — that are not tied to a specific product.	By moving to a smaller office we cut our overheads by nearly thirty percent.
cash flow	The movement of money into and out of a business; positive cash flow means more is coming in than going out.	The business was profitable on paper but nearly failed because of poor cash flow.
assets / liabilities	Assets are things the company owns that have value; liabilities are what it owes to others.	The balance sheet lists our assets, such as property and equipment, against our liabilities, such as loans.
ROI	Return on investment — the gain made relative to the money spent, usually shown as a percentage.	The campaign delivered a strong ROI, returning three dollars for every dollar we spent.
budget	A plan that sets how much money is available to spend over a period.	Marketing has overspent its budget, so the rest of the project will have to be scaled back.
forecast	A prediction of future financial figures such as sales or costs, based on current data.	Our forecast assumes sales will grow steadily through the second half of the year.
invoice	A document requesting payment for goods or services delivered.	Please settle the invoice within thirty days of receipt to avoid a late fee.
profit / loss	What remains after costs are subtracted from revenue; a loss occurs when costs exceed revenue.	After two years of losses, the division finally returned to profit last quarter.

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
break even	The point at which revenue exactly covers costs, so there is neither profit nor loss.	We expect the new product to break even within eighteen months of launch.
fiscal year	The twelve-month period a company uses for accounting, which need not match the calendar year.	Our fiscal year ends in March, so the busiest reporting period is early spring.
depreciation	The gradual reduction in the recorded value of an asset as it ages or is used.	After depreciation, the three-year-old machinery is worth only half its purchase price.

EASILY CONFUSED: REVENUE VS PROFIT

Revenue is all the money coming in from sales; **profit** is what is left after every cost has been paid. A company can have enormous revenue and still make a loss. When a colleague says "we had a great year", ask which number they mean — high revenue with no profit is a warning sign, not a celebration.

"TURNOVER" HAS TWO MEANINGS

In British financial English, **turnover** usually means total sales (American English prefers **revenue**). But in any variety of English, *staff turnover* or *employee turnover* means the rate at which people leave the company. Context decides: "turnover of £5 million" is money; "high turnover in the call centre" is people.

2. Marketing & Sales

If finance counts the results, marketing and sales create them. This vocabulary describes how a company attracts strangers, turns them into customers, and keeps them coming back. The language is heavily collocational and increasingly borrowed across the Atlantic, so a marketer in Madrid and one in Toronto will use almost identical terms. Watch how the words trace a journey: a **prospect** becomes a **lead**, the lead moves down the **pipeline**, a **conversion** turns it into a customer, and good **retention** keeps that customer from **churning**.

KEY TERMS IN MARKETING AND SALES

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
brand	The identity, reputation, and perception that distinguish a company or product from rivals.	Years of consistent quality have made the brand a household name across Europe.
lead	A person or company that has shown interest and might become a customer.	The webinar generated over two hundred qualified leads for the sales team to follow up.
prospect	A potential customer who fits the target profile but has not yet engaged.	Our best prospects are mid-sized firms that have just raised new funding.
conversion	The act of turning a visitor or lead into a paying customer; the rate is a key performance figure.	Redesigning the checkout page lifted our conversion rate from two to nearly four percent.
pipeline	The collection of deals at various stages between first contact and a closed sale.	There is a healthy pipeline this quarter, with several large deals close to signing.
churn	The rate at which customers stop using a product or cancel a subscription.	Subscription churn jumped after the price increase, so we introduced a loyalty discount.
market share	The portion of total sales in a market that one company holds, shown as a percentage.	The new entrant has quietly captured ten percent of market share in just two years.
segment	A defined group of customers who share characteristics such as age, industry, or needs.	We tailored the message to the enterprise segment, which cares more about security than price.
campaign	A coordinated set of marketing activities with a specific goal and timeframe.	The summer campaign ran across email, social media, and outdoor advertising.
USP	Unique selling point — the one feature that sets a product apart from competitors.	Our USP is same-day delivery, which none of our rivals can currently match.
B2B / B2C	Business-to-business (selling to other companies) versus business-to-consumer (selling to individuals).	Our B2B clients sign annual contracts, whereas B2C buyers tend to purchase once and move on.

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
retention	Keeping existing customers over time rather than constantly winning new ones.	Improving retention is cheaper than acquisition, so we invested in a customer success team.
upsell	To persuade a customer to buy a more expensive version or add-on.	Support reps are trained to upsell the premium plan when a customer hits a usage limit.

PRO TIP

Sales vocabulary loves the metaphor of a funnel. At the wide top you have many **prospects**; as they move down they become **leads**, then **opportunities**, then customers, with numbers shrinking at each stage. Saying a deal is "at the top of the funnel" signals it is early and uncertain; "at the bottom of the funnel" means it is almost closed. Using the funnel image makes your reports instantly clearer to a commercial audience.

3. Human Resources

Human Resources, often shortened to HR, manages the people side of the organisation: finding them, welcoming them, developing them, and sometimes parting with them. The vocabulary here can be sensitive, so precision matters. There is a real difference between someone who *resigns*, someone who is *made redundant*, and someone who is *dismissed* – and using the wrong word can cause genuine offence or even legal trouble. The terms below cover the employee lifecycle from recruitment to departure.

KEY TERMS IN HUMAN RESOURCES

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
recruit	To find and hire new employees; as a noun, a newly hired person.	We are recruiting three engineers to support the product launch in the autumn.
onboarding	The process of integrating and training a new employee in their first weeks.	A structured onboarding programme helps new hires become productive much faster.
appraisal	A formal review of an employee's performance, usually held once or twice a year.	In her annual appraisal, she agreed clear goals for the year ahead with her manager.
headcount	The total number of people employed by a company or team.	A hiring freeze means the department's headcount will stay flat until next year.
severance	Money and benefits paid to an employee when their job ends, often after redundancy.	Staff affected by the closure were offered a generous severance package.
perks / benefits	Non-salary rewards such as health insurance, a pension, or extra holiday.	The benefits include private healthcare, and one popular perk is a free gym membership.
attrition	The gradual loss of staff through resignation or retirement, without forced cuts.	Rather than make layoffs, the firm reduced headcount through natural attrition.
redundancy	(British usage) The loss of a job because the role is no longer needed, not because of poor performance.	When the factory automated its line, fifty roles were made redundant.
probation	An initial trial period during which a new employee's suitability is assessed.	He passed his three-month probation and was confirmed in the role.
notice period	The time an employee must work between resigning and actually leaving.	She has a one-month notice period, so her last day is the end of June.
turnover (staff)	The rate at which employees leave and are replaced.	High staff turnover in the warehouse pointed to a deeper problem with pay and conditions.
appointment	The act of formally giving someone a job or position.	The board announced the appointment of a new chief financial officer.

BRITISH VS AMERICAN: JOBS AND PAY

The same employment ideas have different labels on each side of the Atlantic. British **redundancy** is American **layoff**; British **CV** is American **résumé**; British **annual leave** is American **vacation** or **PTO** (paid time off). British **salary rise** is American **salary raise**. In international settings, either form is understood, but pick one and stay consistent within a document.

4. Operations & Supply Chain

Operations is the engine room where plans become physical reality: goods are sourced, made, stored, and delivered. Supply-chain vocabulary has moved from the warehouse into everyday boardroom conversation, especially since global disruptions taught everyone what a **bottleneck** can do. The terms below describe how a company gets what it needs, keeps the right amount of it, and moves it to customers efficiently. Note the useful distinction between buying inputs (**procurement**) and the partners you buy from (**suppliers** or **vendors**).

KEY TERMS IN OPERATIONS AND SUPPLY CHAIN

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
logistics	The planning and management of moving and storing goods.	Our logistics team coordinates shipping across four continents every day.
inventory	The stock of goods and materials a business holds at a given time.	We carry too much inventory, which ties up cash and fills the warehouse.
lead time	The time between placing an order and receiving the goods.	The supplier's lead time is six weeks, so we order well ahead of the season.
supplier / vendor	A company that provides goods or services to your business.	We rely on a single supplier for that component, which is a serious risk.
procurement	The process of finding, agreeing terms with, and buying from suppliers.	The procurement department negotiated a fifteen percent discount on bulk orders.
capacity	The maximum amount a facility or team can produce or handle.	The plant is running at full capacity and cannot take on new orders this quarter.
bottleneck	A single stage that slows down the whole process because it cannot keep up.	Quality inspection became a bottleneck, delaying every shipment by two days.
outsource	To pay an outside company to perform a task instead of doing it in-house.	We outsource customer support to a specialist firm to cut costs and gain expertise.
SLA	Service-level agreement — a contract that sets the standard of service expected, such as response time.	Under the SLA, the provider must resolve critical faults within four hours.
fulfilment	The complete process of receiving, packing, and shipping customer orders.	Faster fulfilment has cut our average delivery time to two days.
just-in-time	A method of receiving materials only as they are needed, to minimise stored inventory.	The just-in-time system keeps costs low but leaves little room for delays.
downtime	A period when equipment or systems are not operating.	Scheduled maintenance caused two hours of downtime on the production line.

EASILY CONFUSED: VENDOR VS SUPPLIER

In everyday use these are near-synonyms, and many people swap them freely. A subtle distinction does exist: **supplier** tends to describe a partner that provides raw materials or components feeding into what you make, often under a long-term relationship; **vendor** is broader and is common in technology and procurement for any company selling you a finished product or service. When in doubt, "supplier" is the safer, more universal choice in spoken British English; "vendor" dominates in software and American procurement.

5. Management & Strategy

Strategy vocabulary is where business English meets jargon, and it pays to use it precisely rather than as decoration. These words describe how leaders set direction, measure progress, and allocate effort. Used well, they make a plan sound concrete: a **roadmap** with clear **milestones**, measurable **KPIs**, and defined **deliverables** tells everyone exactly what success looks like. Used badly — strung together as empty buzzwords — they make a speaker sound vague. The table separates the genuinely useful core from the merely fashionable.

KEY TERMS IN MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
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Term	Meaning	Example in a sentence
KPI	Key performance indicator — a specific, measurable figure used to track progress toward a goal.	Our main KPI this quarter is customer retention, not raw new-user numbers.
milestone	A significant checkpoint that marks progress in a project or plan.	Reaching one million users was a major milestone for the young company.
deliverable	A specific, tangible output that a project is expected to produce.	The first deliverable is a working prototype, due at the end of the month.
stakeholder	Anyone with an interest in or affected by a project or decision, inside or outside the company.	Before launching, we consulted every stakeholder, from investors to frontline staff.
scope	The defined boundaries of what a project will and will not include.	Adding new features now is outside the scope we agreed, so it must wait.
scale	To grow a business or system so it can handle much greater volume, ideally without costs rising as fast.	The platform was built to scale, so doubling our users barely changed our costs.
leverage	To use an existing resource, strength, or relationship to maximum advantage.	We can leverage our brand reputation to enter the adjacent market quickly.
benchmark	A standard or reference point against which performance is measured and compared.	We benchmark our delivery times against the two largest competitors each quarter.
synergy	The extra value created when two teams or companies work together, beyond what they achieve alone.	The merger was justified by the synergies between the two distribution networks.
roadmap	A high-level plan showing the sequence and timing of major goals over a period.	The product roadmap for next year prioritises mobile before any desktop work.
scope creep	The gradual, uncontrolled expansion of a project beyond its original goals.	Constant new requests caused scope creep, and the deadline slipped by a month.
deadline	The latest time by which something must be finished.	We are working flat out to hit the deadline for the investor presentation.

PRO TIP

Words like **leverage**, **synergy**, and **scale** are powerful but overused. The test is simple: could you replace the word with a plain alternative and lose nothing? If "leverage our network" really just means "use our contacts", say "use". Reserve the strategic vocabulary for moments when it adds genuine precision, and your English will sound confident rather than inflated.

Below is a short dialogue showing how naturally these terms blend across themes in a real meeting. Notice how a single conversation can move from strategy to finance to operations without missing a beat.

Priya: Our main KPI this quarter is retention, and the numbers are worrying — churn is up since the price change.
Marco: Agreed. Revenue still looks healthy, but if customers keep leaving, the forecast for next year is too optimistic.
Priya: There is also a bottleneck in fulfilment. Lead times have crept up and that hurts retention more than the price did.
Marco: Then let us bring the logistics stakeholders into the next review. If we can leverage the new warehouse, we should be able to scale fulfilment without blowing the budget.

Putting it together

The five themes overlap constantly in real working life, and the strongest professionals move between them fluently. A marketer who understands **margin** argues more persuasively for a campaign; an operations manager who speaks the language of **KPIs** wins resources more easily. As you read business news and listen to colleagues, collect the collocations, not just the single words — *hit a milestone*, *cut overheads*, *close a deal*, *manage the pipeline* — because it is the natural pairings that mark out a fluent speaker. The exercise below lets you check that the core terms have stuck.

PRACTICE

Part A — Match the term to its definition. Write the correct letter next to each number.

1. churn 2. overheads 3. lead time 4. milestone 5. ROI 6. onboarding 7. bottleneck 8. USP

- a. the ongoing running costs not tied to a single product
- b. a stage that slows down the whole process
- c. the rate at which customers stop using a product
- d. the feature that sets a product apart from rivals
- e. the gain made relative to the money spent
- f. the time between ordering goods and receiving them
- g. a significant checkpoint marking progress
- h. the process of integrating a new employee

Part B — Gap-fill. Complete each sentence with one term from this chapter.

- 9. The company is profitable, but weak _____ nearly caused it to run out of money.
- 10. We need to consult every _____ before changing the plan, including staff and investors.
- 11. The factory is at full _____ and cannot accept any new orders this quarter.
- 12. After two loss-making years, the division expects to _____ by next spring.
- 13. Improving customer _____ is cheaper than constantly acquiring new buyers.
- 14. Please settle the _____ within thirty days to avoid a late fee.

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1-c, 2-a, 3-f, 4-g, 5-e, 6-h, 7-b, 8-d.

Part B: 9. cash flow; 10. stakeholder; 11. capacity; 12. break even; 13. retention; 14. invoice.

Sentence Structures for Business

Patterns and frames that make you sound clear, polished, and professional

Vocabulary tells people what you mean; **structure** tells them how to feel about it. The same idea—"we can't deliver on Friday"—can sound blunt, apologetic, or reassuring depending entirely on the frame you wrap it in. This chapter is a toolkit of dependable sentence patterns that experienced professionals reach for every day: ways to soften bad news, ask for things without imposing, sound objective rather than accusatory, and structure proposals so they invite agreement. You don't need to memorise grammar rules to use them. You need a handful of reliable stems you can drop into an email or a meeting and trust to land well. Read each section, steal the frames, and adapt the examples to your own work.

1. Hedging & softening

In business, certainty can sound arrogant or risky. **Hedging** language lets you make a point while leaving room for doubt, disagreement, and politeness. It signals that you respect the other person's view and that you're open to being wrong—which, paradoxically, makes people trust you more. The skill is to hedge enough to sound diplomatic without hedging so much that you sound evasive or weak.

FRAMES FOR HEDGING AND SOFTENING CLAIMS

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Soften a fact	It seems / appears that...	It seems that demand has slowed in the last quarter.
Report a problem gently	There appears to be...	There appears to be a small discrepancy in the figures.
Propose carefully	We may want to consider...	We may want to consider pausing the campaign for a week.
Deliver bad news	I'm afraid (that)...	I'm afraid we won't be able to meet the original deadline.
Limit a claim	To some extent / in part...	To some extent, the delay was caused by supplier issues.
Distance yourself	It could be argued that...	It could be argued that the targets were set too high.
Estimate	roughly / approximately / in the region of...	The fix will take roughly two weeks.
Give a tentative view	I tend to think (that)...	I tend to think the second option is safer.

Notice the small modal verbs—*may*, *might*, *could*, *would*—and the adverbs *perhaps*, *possibly*, and *arguably*. These are the dials you turn up or down. "This is wrong" becomes "This might not be quite right"; "You missed the deadline" becomes "It seems the deadline may have slipped." The information survives; the accusation disappears.

DON'T OVER-HEDGE

A sentence stacked with hedges loses all force: *"I just sort of think that maybe we could possibly perhaps consider looking at this at some point?"* Pick one or two hedging devices, not five. Hedge the claim, then commit to it. Vagueness is not the same as diplomacy.

2. Diplomatic requests

Direct imperatives—"Send me the report," "Call the client"—are fine between close colleagues but can read as cold or bossy with clients, seniors, or people you don't know well. The English-speaking business world prefers requests dressed as questions and wrapped in a layer of distance. The longer and more indirect the request, generally the more polite it sounds.

FRAMES FOR POLITE AND DIPLOMATIC REQUESTS

Function	Sentence frame	Example
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Function	Sentence frame	Example
Standard polite ask	Could you (possibly)...?	Could you possibly send the figures by Thursday?
Very polite ask	Would you mind + -ing...?	Would you mind reviewing the draft before we share it?
Tentative request	I was wondering if you could...	I was wondering if you could spare ten minutes today.
Soft suggestion	It would be great if you could...	It would be great if you could join the call.
Seeking permission	Would it be possible to...?	Would it be possible to move our meeting to Friday?
Polite chase	I'd appreciate it if you could...	I'd appreciate it if you could confirm by end of day.
Offering an out	If you have a moment, ...	If you have a moment, could you take a quick look?
Checking willingness	Do you think you could...?	Do you think you could prioritise this one?

Two techniques do most of the work here. First, **backshifting** into the past tense to create distance: "I *was* wondering" sounds gentler than "I *am* wondering," and "I'd appreciate" softer than "I appreciate." Second, the **embedded question**: rather than asking "Can you do this?" you bury the request inside a frame—"I was wondering whether you might be able to do this." Use the strongest forms ("Would you mind...", "I was wondering if...") with senior or external people, and lighter forms ("Could you...") within your team.

MATCH THE SIZE OF THE ASK

Scale your politeness to the favour. A two-minute task ("Could you cc me?") doesn't need "I was wondering if you might possibly be able to..."—that can sound sarcastic or strained. Reserve the most elaborate frames for genuine impositions on someone's time or authority.

3. The passive voice in business

The **passive voice** (*A decision was made*) moves the focus away from *who* did something to *what* was done. Business writing uses it deliberately for three reasons: **focus**, when the action matters more than the actor; **diplomacy**, when naming the actor would assign blame; and **objectivity**, when you want to sound neutral and institutional rather than personal.

WHEN AND HOW THE PASSIVE EARNS ITS PLACE

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Avoid blame	Mistakes were made / An error was made...	An error was made in the invoice, which we've now corrected.
Focus on the action	A decision has been taken to...	A decision has been taken to extend the trial period.
Report a process	The data was collected / analysed...	The data was collected over six months and then analysed.
State a policy	Refunds are issued within...	Refunds are issued within five working days.
Soften a directive	It is expected that...	It is expected that all reports are submitted by Friday.
Cite agreement	It was agreed that...	It was agreed that marketing would lead the rollout.

Compare "*You made a mistake in the figures*" with "*There seems to be a mistake in the figures*" or "*An error appears to have crept into the figures*." The passive and the impersonal let you fix the problem without putting anyone on the defensive. Likewise, "It was decided to cut the budget" protects the individual who decided and frames it as a considered, collective outcome.

CAUTION: DON'T DROWN IN THE PASSIVE

Over-used, the passive makes writing heavy, evasive, and hard to read: "*It has been determined that action will be required*." Who determined? Who acts? Default to the active voice for clarity and ownership—"We need to act"—and switch to the passive only when focus, diplomacy, or objectivity genuinely call for it. A good test: if removing the actor hides accountability that the reader deserves, keep it active.

4. Conditionals for negotiation & proposals

Negotiation runs on **conditionals**—"if X, then Y." They let you offer something without committing unconditionally, and they tie a concession from you to a concession from them. Mastering three forms gives you most of what you need.

CONDITIONAL FRAMES FOR DEALS AND PROPOSALS

Function	Sentence frame	Example
General truth (zero)	If we order in bulk, we get a discount.	If clients pay early, they receive a two-percent rebate.
Realistic offer (first)	If you can..., we'll...	If you can confirm today, we'll hold the price.
Hypothetical / softer (second)	If you were to..., we would...	If you were to double the volume, we would revisit the rate.
Set a precondition	Provided that... / As long as...	Provided that the scope stays fixed, we can meet the date.
Negative condition	Unless...	Unless we hear otherwise, we'll proceed on Monday.
Formal hypothetical	Were we to... / Should you...	Were we to extend the contract, what terms would apply?
Trade a concession	In return for..., we'd be willing to...	In return for a longer term, we'd be willing to lower the fee.

The **second conditional** ("If you were to..., we would...") is the negotiator's friend because it floats an idea without putting it on the table. It lets both sides explore "what if" with no obligation. The inverted forms—*Were we to...*, *Should you...*—are more formal and work well in contracts and written proposals. And always make your offers reciprocal: never give a concession without attaching a condition ("If we do this, then you do that"). A one-sided "yes" trains the other side to keep asking.

5. Cause & effect / linking

Clear reasoning depends on signposting the logic between sentences. **Linking words** tell the reader whether what follows is a result, a reason, a purpose, or a contrast. Used well, they make an argument feel inevitable; used carelessly, they confuse it.

CONNECTORS FOR CAUSE, EFFECT, AND PURPOSE

Function	Sentence frame	Example
State a result	therefore / as a result / consequently...	Sales fell sharply; therefore, we revised the forecast.
Give a reason (formal)	due to / owing to + noun	The launch was delayed owing to a supplier shortage.
Give a reason (clause)	because / since / as...	Since margins are tight, we're reviewing all costs.
Express purpose	with a view to + -ing / in order to...	We hired two analysts with a view to improving reporting.
Add a consequence	this means that... / which led to...	The system was down, which led to several missed orders.
Signal a condition's effect	hence / thus...	The data is incomplete; hence the cautious estimate.

A note on register: *due to* and *owing to* are followed by a noun ("due to the delay"), while *because* introduces a full clause ("because we were delayed"). *Therefore*, *consequently*, and *as a result* are interchangeable in most contexts; vary them so your writing doesn't sound mechanical.

COHESION, NOT JUST CONNECTORS

Linking words help, but real cohesion comes from *order* and *reference*. Put the known idea first and the new idea second, and use pronouns and pointing words—*this*, *that*, *such*, *the latter*—to stitch sentences together. "We launched late. This cost us two key accounts" flows because "this" refers back. A paragraph glued only with "and then... and then" has no spine.

6. Cleft sentences & emphasis

Cleft sentences split one idea into two clauses to spotlight the part that matters. Instead of "We need more time," you say "*What we need is more time*"—and the reader feels the emphasis land. These structures are powerful in presentations, persuasive emails, and any moment you want to control where attention falls.

FRAMES FOR EMPHASIS AND FOCUS

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Emphasise the key need	What we need is...	What we need is a clear owner for each task.
Explain the reason	The reason (we...) is that...	The reason we paused is that the budget wasn't approved.
Single out a factor	It is X that / who...	It is the onboarding step that slows everything down.
Highlight an action	What we did was...	What we did was renegotiate the terms before signing.
Stress the place / time	It was only when... that...	It was only when we tested it that the flaw appeared.
Frame the priority	The (one) thing that matters most is...	The thing that matters most is keeping the client informed.

Clefts also work defensively. "It wasn't the team that caused the delay—it was the approval process" shifts blame from people to a system without sounding evasive. Use them sparingly, though; one well-placed cleft per paragraph creates emphasis, while three in a row create noise.

7. Comparatives & expressing degree

Numbers persuade, but only when you describe the *scale* of a change precisely. Saying revenue is "higher" tells the listener almost nothing; saying it is "*significantly higher*" or "*marginally lower*" tells them how much to care. Calibrated comparatives make you sound analytical and in control of the data.

FRAMES FOR COMPARISON AND DEGREE

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Big difference	significantly / substantially / considerably + -er	Costs are significantly higher than last year.
Small difference	slightly / marginally / somewhat + -er	Conversion is marginally lower this quarter.
Multiples	twice / three times as ... as	Mobile traffic is twice as large as desktop.
Proportional change	the more..., the more...	The faster we ship, the more feedback we gather.
Approximate parity	roughly in line with / on a par with...	Q2 results are roughly in line with Q1.
Express a trend	increasingly / progressively...	Customers are increasingly choosing the annual plan.

Keep a mental scale of intensifiers: *marginally* < *slightly* < *moderately* < *considerably* < *significantly* < *dramatically*. Reach for the strong end only when the data justifies it; overstating makes your next claim less believable.

8. Reporting & attributing

When you pass on information that isn't your own opinion—data, research, what a client said—**attribution** protects your credibility. It signals where a claim comes from and how much you're vouching for it. The choice of reporting verb subtly tells the reader how confident to be.

FRAMES FOR REPORTING AND ATTRIBUTING

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Cite a source	According to...	According to the latest report, churn has fallen.
Present evidence cautiously	The data suggests / indicates...	The data suggests that price is the main driver.
Report common belief	It is widely reported / believed that...	It is widely reported that demand will recover by Q4.

Function	Sentence frame	Example
Attribute a view	X argues / claims / points out that...	The vendor claims the upgrade is backward-compatible.
Hedge a finding	The findings appear to show...	The findings appear to show a seasonal pattern.
Quote a figure	Figures from X put ... at ...	Figures from finance put the overspend at 4%.

Reporting verbs carry attitude. "The vendor *states*" is neutral; "the vendor *claims*" quietly signals doubt; "the report *confirms*" signals agreement. Choose deliberately. And prefer "the data suggests" over "the data proves"—proof is a strong word, and cautious attribution rarely embarrasses you later.

Putting it together: clunky vs. polished

Each principle in this chapter is small, but together they transform a message. Compare these two versions of the same update.

AVOID

✗ You didn't send the data so we missed the deadline. The numbers are way down. We need you to fix it now. Send it today or we can't continue.

BETTER

✓ It seems the data didn't reach us in time, which meant the deadline slipped. The figures are significantly lower than expected, so we may want to review the cause together. Would you mind sending the file today? Provided that we have it by this evening, we'll be able to stay on track.

The "better" version hedges the problem ("it seems"), uses cause-and-effect linking ("which meant," "so"), softens the request ("would you mind"), calibrates the comparison ("significantly lower"), and ties cooperation to a condition ("provided that... we'll"). Nothing important is lost, and the relationship survives intact.

Diplomatic structures in action

Here is a short exchange in a project meeting where two colleagues disagree about a slipping timeline. Notice how the structures from this chapter keep the conversation constructive even under pressure.

Maya: Thanks for joining. I'm afraid we appear to be a little behind on the integration work.

Tomás: It seems that way, yes. The reason we're behind is that the test environment wasn't ready until last week.

Maya: Understood. I was wondering if we could bring in an extra developer for a fortnight.

Tomás: That could work. If you can free up the budget, we'd be able to start on Monday.

Maya: Provided that we keep the scope fixed, I think I can approve it. What we really need is a realistic date we can commit to.

Tomás: Agreed. Were we to add the developer, I'd estimate roughly three weeks to finish—marginally later than planned, but far more reliable.

Maya: That works. It would be great if you could send me a revised plan by Thursday.

No one is blamed, no one is cornered, and yet a concrete decision is reached. The hedges ("appears," "it seems"), the diplomatic request ("I was wondering if"), the cleft ("What we really need is"), the conditional trade ("If you can..., we'd..."), and the calibrated comparative ("marginally later") all do quiet, cooperative work.

Exercise: soften and structure

Rewrite each blunt sentence as a more diplomatic, hedged, or better-structured version using a frame from this chapter. There is more than one good answer; the sample key shows one possibility.

1. You sent the wrong file.
2. Give me the report by Friday.
3. Sales are down.
4. We won't lower the price.
5. The plan failed because of you.

6. I want a meeting tomorrow.
7. The supplier is lying about the delivery date.
8. We need a decision now.

ANSWER KEY (SAMPLE RESPONSES)

1. It seems the wrong file may have been attached—would you mind resending it?
2. Could you possibly send the report by Friday? I'd really appreciate it.
3. The figures appear to be somewhat lower than last quarter.
4. I'm afraid we wouldn't be able to lower the price, unless the volume increases.
5. It seems the plan ran into difficulties, in part owing to delays on the input side.
6. I was wondering if we could meet tomorrow, if you have a moment.
7. The supplier's stated delivery date doesn't quite appear to match what we were told earlier.
8. What we really need is a decision soon; provided that we agree today, we'll be able to proceed on Monday.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Structure shapes tone as much as words do. Hedge claims to sound open, not arrogant. Wrap requests in distance and embedded questions. Use the passive for focus, diplomacy, and objectivity—but default to the active for clarity. Tie every concession to a condition. Signpost cause and effect, spotlight what matters with clefts, calibrate your comparisons, and attribute carefully. Master these frames and you'll sound clear, polished, and professional in almost any business situation.

Phrasal Verbs at Work

The everyday multi-word verbs that power spoken and written business English

Open any meeting, read any email thread, and you will hear them everywhere: *let me bring up one point, can you follow up on that, we need to roll out the update*. These are **phrasal verbs** — a verb plus one or two small particles (such as *up, out, on, or over*) that together carry a meaning you often cannot guess from the parts alone. They are the connective tissue of natural, fluent business English. A non-native speaker who says *We will conduct the survey next week* sounds correct but slightly formal; a colleague who says *We'll carry out the survey next week* sounds like an insider. Mastering phrasal verbs is one of the fastest ways to move from *accurate* English to *natural* English.

There is a useful twist, though. Almost every common business phrasal verb has a one-word, Latin-derived equivalent that sounds more formal: *carry out* matches *conduct*, *put off* matches *postpone*, *set up* matches *establish*. This gives you a dial you can turn. In a relaxed team call or a quick message, the phrasal verb is warmer and more idiomatic. In a report, a contract, or a message to a client you have never met, the single formal verb is often safer and crisper. This chapter teaches you both halves of that dial, theme by theme, so you can choose the right register every time. The tables below give the meaning, a natural example, and the formal equivalent for each verb. Read them, but more importantly, say the example sentences aloud — phrasal verbs live in the ear.

1. Meetings & discussion

These verbs are the spoken machinery of meetings: how you raise topics, structure them, and close them down. Notice how many describe the *shape* of a conversation rather than its content — opening it, narrowing it, summarising it, parking it for later.

VERBS FOR RAISING, ORGANISING AND CLOSING DISCUSSION

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
bring up	introduce a topic for discussion	I'd like to bring up the budget before we finish.	raise, mention
point out	draw attention to a fact	She pointed out that the deadline had slipped.	note, indicate
go over	review or examine in detail	Let's go over the figures one more time.	review, examine
sum up	state the main points briefly	To sum up, we agree on the timeline but not the price.	summarise, recap
wrap up	bring to a close	Let's wrap up — we're out of time.	conclude, finalise
put forward	propose an idea or plan	He put forward an interesting alternative.	propose, suggest
talk through	discuss something thoroughly, step by step	Can we talk through the risks together?	discuss, examine
run by	tell someone an idea to get their reaction	I'd like to run this by you before I send it.	consult on, check with
follow up	take further action after a first step	I'll follow up with a written summary.	pursue, revisit
kick off	start an event or meeting	Let's kick off with a quick status update.	begin, commence
touch on	mention briefly, without detail	The report only touches on pricing.	mention, address briefly
bring forward	move an event to an earlier time	We've brought the launch forward to March.	advance, reschedule earlier
put off	delay to a later time	They've put off the decision until Q3.	postpone, defer

TIP: OPENING AND CLOSING PHRASES

Three of these verbs are almost ritual openers and closers. *kick off* signals the start (*Shall we kick off?*); *sum up* and *wrap up* signal the end. Using them at the right moment makes you sound like a confident chair, even in a second language. Be careful not to confuse *bring forward* (make earlier) with *put off* (make later) — they are opposites, and mixing them up causes real diary chaos.

2. Projects & tasks

This is the verb family of execution: starting work, owning it, fixing problems, and shipping the result. Many of these are slightly more *doing*-oriented and appear constantly in project updates and stand-ups.

VERBS FOR EXECUTING AND MANAGING WORK

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
carry out	perform or complete a task	We carried out the tests over the weekend.	conduct, perform
set up	create or arrange something new	We set up a new account for the client.	establish, arrange
take on	accept responsibility for; hire	I can't take on any more work this month.	assume, undertake
deal with	handle a problem or task	Sales will deal with the complaint directly.	handle, manage
sort out	resolve or organise a problem	Let me sort out the invoice mix-up.	resolve, organise
work out	find a solution; calculate	We still need to work out the logistics.	resolve, calculate
draw up	prepare a formal document	Legal will draw up the contract.	prepare, draft
roll out	launch or introduce gradually	We'll roll out the feature region by region.	launch, implement
scale up	increase in size or capacity	We need to scale up production fast.	expand, increase
fall behind	fail to keep pace with a schedule	The vendor has fallen behind on delivery.	lag, slip
catch up	reach the expected level after a delay	If we add staff, we can catch up by Friday.	recover, get up to date
hand over	transfer responsibility to someone	I'll hand over my projects before I leave.	transfer, delegate
pull off	succeed at something difficult	Somehow the team pulled off the launch on time.	achieve, accomplish

NOTE: SAME VERB, TWO SENSES

Several phrasal verbs here carry more than one meaning. *take on* can mean *accept work* (*take on a project*) or *hire* (*take on three engineers*). *work out* can mean *solve* (*work out a problem*), *calculate* (*work out the cost*), or, intransitively, *end well* (*It all worked out*). Context tells you which sense is meant — don't assume one verb equals one meaning.

3. Money & business performance

When the conversation turns to numbers — revenue, costs, profit, growth — a distinctive set of phrasal verbs appears. Some are neutral; a few (*lay off*, *write off*) carry serious weight, so use them precisely.

VERBS FOR FINANCE, COSTS AND GROWTH

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
account for	make up a proportion; explain	Asia accounts for 40% of our revenue.	constitute, explain
take off	suddenly become successful	Sales really took off after the rebrand.	surge, succeed
pay off	result in success; repay fully	The investment in training paid off.	succeed, repay
write off	cancel a debt or asset as a loss	We had to write off the bad debt.	cancel, depreciate
cut back	reduce spending or activity	We're cutting back on travel this year.	reduce, curtail
lay off	dismiss staff for economic reasons	The firm laid off 200 workers.	make redundant, dismiss

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
branch out	expand into a new area	The bakery branched out into catering.	diversify, expand
break even	make neither profit nor loss	We expect to break even in year two.	cover costs
bank on	depend on something happening	Don't bank on the deal closing this quarter.	rely on, count on

WARNING: HANDLE SENSITIVE VERBS WITH CARE

lay off and *write off* describe real, often painful events. *Lay off* means dismissing people because the business needs to cut costs — it is not the same as firing someone for poor performance. In formal communication, *make redundant* (British) or *let go* is more tactful, and HR documents usually avoid the bare phrasal verb. Choose the register your reader expects.

4. People & management

Organisations are built on who covers for whom, who reports to whom, and who steps into a role. These verbs describe movement of people and responsibility through a structure.

VERBS FOR ROLES, COVER AND REPORTING LINES

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
back up	support; make a copy	I'll back you up in the meeting.	support, corroborate
fill in	do someone's job temporarily	Can you fill in for Maria on Friday?	substitute, cover
step down	resign from a position	The CFO will step down in June.	resign, retire
step in	intervene to help or take control	The director stepped in to settle the dispute.	intervene, mediate
take over	assume control or a role	She'll take over the team next month.	assume control, succeed
report to	be managed by someone	The analysts report to the finance lead.	be accountable to
bring in	recruit or involve someone new	We brought in a consultant to advise us.	recruit, engage
let go	dismiss an employee (gently phrased)	Sadly, we had to let two people go.	dismiss, release
sign off	approve formally	The manager needs to sign off on expenses.	approve, authorise
weigh in	contribute an opinion to a debate	Could you weigh in on the design choice?	contribute, comment

NOTE: THE DEPENDENT PREPOSITION MATTERS

Some of these verbs need a fixed preposition to attach an object: you *sign off on* a budget, you *report to* a manager, you *weigh in on* a topic. Learn the preposition as part of the verb. Saying *sign off the budget* (without *on*) is heard in casual British usage, but *sign off on* is the safer international choice.

5. Communication & email

Modern work runs on messages, and a compact vocabulary has grown up around them — replying, including people, and prompting action. These are heavily used in writing, which makes register awareness especially important here.

VERBS FOR MESSAGING, REPLYING AND INCLUDING PEOPLE

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
get back to	reply to someone later	I'll get back to you by tomorrow.	respond to, revert to
reach out	make contact, often proactively	Feel free to reach out with any questions.	contact, approach
follow up on	pursue or check progress on	I'm following up on my last email.	pursue, revisit
copy in	add someone to an email's recipients	Please copy in Legal on that thread.	include, cc

Phrasal verb	Meaning	Example sentence	Formal equivalent
loop in	add someone so they're informed	Let me loop in our support team.	involve, inform
chase up	remind someone to act (BrE)	I'll chase up the supplier for a date.	follow up, prompt
flag up	draw attention to an issue	Thanks for flagging up the typo.	highlight, raise
fill out	complete a form with information	Please fill out the attached form.	complete, populate
log in	access an account or system	You'll need to log in to the portal.	sign in, access

Loop in and *copy in* are near-synonyms, but with a nuance: *copy in* is about the mechanics of the **cc** field, while *loop in* emphasises keeping a person *informed and involved* going forward. *Reach out* has become extremely common in international business, though some readers find it overused; *contact* remains a perfectly safe neutral choice.

Separable or inseparable? Where the object goes

The single trickiest grammar point with phrasal verbs is where to put the object — especially when that object is a pronoun like *it*, *them*, or *him*. The verbs split into two groups.

KEY: OBJECT PLACEMENT RULES

Separable verbs (verb + adverb particle, e.g. *fill out*, *set up*, *bring up*, *hand over*, *sort out*) let the object sit in the middle or at the end when it is a noun:

Please fill out the form. / Please fill the form out.

But when the object is a **pronoun**, it *must* go in the middle:

Please fill it out. (not “fill out it”)

Inseparable verbs (verb + preposition, e.g. *deal with*, *account for*, *report to*, *bank on*, *look into*) keep the particle glued to the verb — the object always comes after, pronoun or not:

We'll deal with the issue. / We'll deal with it. (not “deal it with”)

Three-word verbs (*follow up on*, *get back to*, *catch up on*) are always inseparable: *I'll get back to you*, never “get you back to.”

If you are unsure whether a verb is separable, a safe default is to place a noun object *after* the whole verb (*fill out the form*) — this is correct for both types. The placement only becomes obligatory with pronouns, and there the rule is simple: with separable verbs, pronouns go in the middle; with inseparable verbs, everything follows the particle.

A meeting in phrasal verbs

The dialogue below packs in verbs from every section above. Read it once for sense, then again noticing how natural the conversation sounds compared with an all-formal version.

Priya: Right, let's kick off. Daniel, can you go over where we are on the rollout?

Daniel: Sure. We've fallen behind a little — the vendor slipped — but if we bring in two contractors we can catch up by month-end.

Priya: Good. I'll run that by finance and sign off on the budget today. Can you draw up a revised plan?

Daniel: Will do. I should point out that scaling up support will add cost. We may need to cut back somewhere else to break even this quarter.

Priya: Noted. Let's not bank on the new revenue landing early. Sofia, could you weigh in on the customer side?

Sofia: Yes — I'll reach out to the key accounts and follow up on the open tickets. I'll loop in support so nothing falls through.

Priya: Perfect. Let's wrap up. To sum up: Daniel sorts out the plan, I sign off the budget, Sofia chases up the accounts. I'll follow up with notes and copy everyone in.

Gloss: *kick off* = start; *go over* = review; *fallen behind* = behind schedule; *bring in* = recruit; *catch up* = reach the target; *run by* = check with; *sign off on* = approve; *draw up* = prepare; *point out* = note; *scaling up* = increasing capacity; *cut back* = reduce; *break even* = no profit or loss; *bank on* = rely on; *weigh in* = give an opinion; *reach out* = make con-

tact; *follow up on* = pursue; *loop in* = keep informed; *fall through* = fail; *wrap up* = close; *sum up* = summarise; *sort out* = resolve; *chase up* = remind; *copy in* = add to recipients.

Exercise: choose the natural phrasal verb

Part A — Replace the formal verb. Rewrite each sentence, replacing the underlined formal verb with a phrasal verb from this chapter (keep the meaning and tense).

1. The committee will *postpone* the decision until next month.
2. Could you *review* these figures before the call?
3. Our legal team will *prepare* the new contract.
4. Marketing *accounts for* — sorry, please *explain* — the rise in costs.
5. I'll *contact* the supplier and ask for a delivery date.
6. The CEO announced she would *resign* at the end of the year.
7. We need to *reduce* our spending on travel.
8. Please *complete* the attached registration form.

Part B — Supply the missing particle (*up, out, on, over, in, off, back, with, to, forward, behind*).

1. Let me bring ____ a quick point before we move on.
2. We've fallen ____ schedule, but we can catch ____ by Friday.
3. Can you loop ____ the support team on this thread?
4. The manager still needs to sign ____ on the expenses.
5. I'll get ____ to you with an answer tomorrow.
6. Sales really took ____ after the rebrand.
7. We'll deal ____ the complaint first thing.
8. They've brought the launch date ____ to March.

ANSWER KEY

Part A (natural answers; others may be acceptable): 1. *put off* the decision. 2. *go over* these figures. 3. *draw up* the new contract. 4. please *account for* the rise in costs. 5. I'll *reach out to* the supplier (or *get back to*). 6. she would *step down*. 7. *cut back* (on) our spending. 8. please *fill out* the registration form.

Part B: 1. up. 2. behind ... up. 3. in. 4. off. 5. back. 6. off. 7. with. 8. forward.

TIP: BUILD YOUR OWN LIST

The fastest way to absorb phrasal verbs is to harvest them from your own work. Keep a running note: every time a colleague or email uses one, write the verb, a real example from your context, and its formal equivalent. Within a month you will have a personalised list of the fifty verbs that actually matter in *your* job — far more useful than memorising a generic list of hundreds.

Idioms, Collocations & Buzzwords

Sounding natural: the fixed expressions and word partnerships of real business talk

Grammar tells you what is *correct*; idioms and collocations tell you what is *natural*. You can write a flawless sentence and still sound foreign if the words do not partner the way native speakers expect. We do not *make a meeting*—we *hold* one. We do not *do a decision*—we *make* one. This chapter is about those invisible rules of word partnership, plus the colourful fixed phrases (idioms) and the fashionable jargon (buzzwords) that fill modern offices. Master them and your English stops translating and starts *belonging*. Used well, these expressions make you sound fluent, confident and credible. Used badly—or too often—they make you sound either confused or like a parody of a consultant. The goal of this chapter is judgement: knowing the expressions, knowing exactly what they mean, and knowing when to leave them out.

1. Business idioms you will actually hear

An idiom is a phrase whose meaning cannot be worked out from the individual words. *Touch base* has nothing to do with baseball bases in the speaker's mind, and *low-hanging fruit* rarely involves an orchard. These expressions are extremely common in meetings, emails and small talk. The danger is double: not understanding them when you hear them, and using them slightly wrong when you speak. The table below covers the most frequent ones, with the meaning and a natural example for each.

Why bother with idioms at all, if plain language is clearer? Because idioms do a job that plain words struggle to do: they signal that you belong. When you tell a colleague you want to *get the ball rolling*, you are not only proposing a start—you are speaking the shared dialect of the workplace, which builds rapport. Idioms also compress meaning. "*Back to the drawing board*" carries disappointment, acceptance and a fresh resolve in five words. The skill, then, is not to avoid idioms but to understand them precisely and place them well. A learner who hears "let's not *cut corners*" and pictures literal corners will misread the whole sentence. So read the table actively: cover the meaning column, guess from the example, then check yourself.

CORE BUSINESS IDIOMS, THEIR MEANINGS AND USE IN CONTEXT

Expression	Meaning	Example
touch base	make brief contact to share an update	"Let's touch base on Friday to see where we are."
on the same page	in agreement; sharing the same understanding	"Before we start, let's make sure we're all on the same page ."
a ballpark figure	a rough, approximate estimate	"I can't be exact, but a ballpark figure would be around €40,000."
get the ball rolling	start a process or project	"To get the ball rolling , I'll send the brief tomorrow."
think outside the box	think creatively, beyond the obvious	"We need to think outside the box to beat the market leader."
move the needle	make a noticeable, measurable difference	"Small tweaks won't move the needle on revenue."
low-hanging fruit	the easiest tasks with the quickest reward	"Let's grab the low-hanging fruit first and show early wins."
back to the drawing board	start again because the plan failed	"The pilot flopped, so it's back to the drawing board ."
the bottom line	the most important point; the final result or profit	"The bottom line is we need this signed by Q3."
cut corners	do something cheaply or quickly, sacrificing quality	"We can't cut corners on safety testing."
in the loop	kept informed about something	"Please keep me in the loop on the negotiation."

Expression	Meaning	Example
raise the bar	set a higher standard	"Their new app has really raised the bar for the industry."
a win-win	a situation good for both sides	"Flexible hours are a win-win —happier staff, lower turnover."
bite the bullet	accept something difficult or unpleasant	"We had to bite the bullet and cancel the project."
a steep learning curve	a process that is hard to learn quickly	"The new system has a steep learning curve , so allow time."
by the book	strictly following the rules	"Compliance insists we do everything by the book ."
ahead of the curve	more advanced or innovative than competitors	"Investing in AI early kept us ahead of the curve ."
red tape	excessive bureaucracy and official rules	"Too much red tape is slowing down approvals."
a game changer	something that dramatically changes a situation	"Remote work was a game changer for hiring."
corner the market	dominate sales of a product or service	"They've almost cornered the market in electric vans."
a level playing field	a situation of fair, equal competition	"New rules create a level playing field for small firms."

REGISTER CHECK

Idioms are mostly *informal to neutral*. They are perfect for meetings, calls and friendly emails, but use them lightly in formal reports, legal documents or first contact with a new senior client. When in doubt, one well-placed idiom sounds confident; five in a row sounds like you are hiding behind clichés.

2. Strong collocations: verb + noun

A collocation is a pair of words that habitually go together. The meaning is usually transparent, but the *choice* of words is fixed. English speakers *make a decision* (not "do" or "take" it, though "take a decision" survives in British formal use). They *meet a deadline* rather than "reach" it. Getting these partnerships right is one of the fastest ways to sound advanced, because errors here are very visible to native ears even when grammar is perfect.

Collocations matter more than most learners expect. A sentence such as "We need to *do* a strong decision and *reach* our deadline" is fully understandable, yet it instantly marks the writer as non-native, because every fluent speaker feels the wrong partnership like a wrong note in a melody. The good news is that collocations are learnable in chunks. Instead of memorising the word *deadline* alone, store the whole unit—*meet a deadline*, *miss a deadline*, *a tight deadline*, *an extended deadline*. You then recall the phrase ready-made under pressure. The verb + noun pairs below are the workhorses of business English; you will use several of them in almost every meeting you ever attend, so they repay the effort of learning them as fixed combinations rather than as separate words.

HIGH-FREQUENCY VERB + NOUN COLLOCATIONS

Collocation	Meaning / Use	Example
make a decision	decide something	"The board will make a decision next week."
reach an agreement	finally agree after discussion	"After hours of talks, we reached an agreement ."
meet a deadline	finish work by the required time	"We met the deadline with a day to spare."
hit a target	achieve a goal or figure	"Sales hit the target for the third quarter running."
launch a product	introduce a new product to market	"We launch the product in September."
close a deal	finalise a business agreement or sale	"She closed the deal after a long negotiation."
raise concerns	express worries formally	"Several staff raised concerns about the timeline."
take minutes	write an official record of a meeting	"Could you take the minutes today?"

Collocation	Meaning / Use	Example
hold a meeting	organise and run a meeting	"We hold a meeting every Monday at nine."
set priorities	decide what is most important	"Let's set priorities before we assign work."
gain traction	start to gain support or momentum	"The campaign is finally gaining traction online."
drive growth	cause a business to expand	"Exports continue to drive growth for the firm."
cut costs	reduce spending	"We need to cut costs without cutting staff."
deliver results	produce the outcomes expected	"This team consistently delivers results ."
meet expectations	perform as well as hoped	"The quarter met expectations , no more, no less."
address an issue	deal with a problem	"We'll address the issue in the next sprint."

THE "MAKE" VS "DO" TRAP

We *make* a decision, a profit, an offer, an appointment, progress and a mistake. We *do* business, research, a deal (informally), the paperwork and our best. There is no rule that covers every case—these pairings are learned as whole units. When you meet a new noun, learn the verb that travels with it, not the noun alone.

3. Adjective + noun and noun + noun collocations

Beyond verbs, certain adjectives and nouns cluster around business nouns. A deadline is typically *tight* (not "narrow"); an option is *viable* (not "livable"); a stakeholder who matters is *key*. Noun + noun pairs such as *market leader* and *core business* behave almost like single words. The table groups the most useful.

ADJECTIVE + NOUN AND NOUN + NOUN BUSINESS COLLOCATIONS

Expression	Meaning	Example
a key stakeholder	a person or group with major interest in a project	"We must consult every key stakeholder first."
a viable option	a realistic, workable choice	"Outsourcing is the only viable option we have."
a tight deadline	very little time to finish	"It's a tight deadline , but we can manage."
a steep learning curve	something difficult to learn quickly	"New hires face a steep learning curve here."
the market leader	the top company in a sector	"They've been the market leader for a decade."
core business	a company's main, central activity	"Logistics isn't our core business ."
a competitive edge	an advantage over rivals	"Service quality gives us a competitive edge ."
a major setback	a serious problem delaying progress	"The recall was a major setback for the brand."
a ballpark estimate	a rough figure	"Give me a ballpark estimate by Friday."
untapped potential	value or talent not yet used	"There's untapped potential in the Asian market."
a niche market	a small, specialised segment	"We thrive in a niche market others ignore."
a strategic priority	a top long-term goal	"Sustainability is now a strategic priority ."

4. Buzzwords and jargon: handle with care

Buzzwords are fashionable words that spread through offices, often borrowed from technology, finance or management consulting. Many began as useful precise terms and then lost their meaning through overuse. You should *recognise* all of them—colleagues will use them constantly—but *produce* them sparingly. Each entry below includes what people *think* it means, because the gap between the literal and the lived meaning is exactly where confusion lives.

It helps to understand *why* people reach for buzzwords. Sometimes they genuinely save time among specialists who share the same shorthand: an engineering team that says "let's **drill down** into the logs" all know exactly what is meant. More often, though, buzzwords are used to sound impressive, to soften an awkward message, or simply out of habit. A

manager who has no real plan may hide behind "we'll **leverage synergies** going forward" precisely because it sounds active while committing to nothing. As a non-native speaker, your safest strategy is asymmetric: be excellent at *decoding* these words so meetings never lose you, but conservative at *using* them, so you are never the person whose sentences sound full yet say little. When you do choose a buzzword, choose it because it is genuinely the most precise word available, not because it is the most fashionable.

COMMON BUZZWORDS – UNDERSTAND THEM, USE THEM SPARINGLY

Buzzword	What it really means	Example (and plainer alternative)
leverage	use something to maximum advantage	"Let's leverage our data." → "Let's <i>use</i> our data."
synergy	combined effort producing more than the sum	"The merger creates synergy ." → "...lets the teams help each other."
circle back	return to a topic later	"I'll circle back on this." → "I'll <i>get back to you</i> ."
deep dive	a detailed examination	"We need a deep dive ." → "...a <i>close look</i> ."
bandwidth	available time or capacity to do work	"I don't have the bandwidth ." → "...the <i>time</i> ."
drill down	examine detail within data	"Let's drill down into the numbers." → "...look at the detail."
move the needle	make a measurable difference	"Will this move the needle ?" → "...make a real difference?"
paradigm shift	a fundamental change in approach	"It's a paradigm shift ." → "...a completely new way of working."
touch base	make brief contact	"Let's touch base ." → "Let's <i>talk briefly</i> ."
align	agree on a shared approach	"We need to align on this." → "...agree on this."

CLARITY BEATS JARGON

The most respected communicators are usually the *clearest*, not the most fashionable. Jargon can exclude non-experts, hide weak thinking, and irritate senior people who have heard it a thousand times. A simple test: if a phrase would confuse a smart newcomer to your company, replace it with plain words. Reserve buzzwords for moments when they genuinely say something faster than ordinary English—and never stack three of them in one sentence ("Let's leverage our synergies to move the needle"). That sentence says almost nothing.

5. Idioms in action: a dialogue

Read this short project meeting. Each idiom is glossed in brackets so you can see how naturally they combine in real speech.

Maria: Thanks for joining. I wanted to **touch base** [make brief contact] before the launch. Are we all **on the same page** [in agreement]?

David: Mostly. But the timeline is a **tight deadline** [very little time], and testing has a **steep learning curve** [hard to learn fast]. I don't want to **cut corners** [sacrifice quality].

Maria: Agreed. Let's **get the ball rolling** [start] on the easy parts first—grab the **low-hanging fruit** [quick, easy wins] and show progress early.

David: Sensible. The **bottom line** [the key point] is that quality can't slip. If the pilot fails, it's **back to the drawing board** [starting over].

Maria: True. But if it works, it could be a real **game changer** [something transformative] and keep us **ahead of the curve** [more advanced than rivals]. Just keep me **in the loop** [informed] on the testing.

David: Of course. And honestly, the new compliance rules are a lot of **red tape** [bureaucracy], but we have to do this one strictly **by the book** [following rules].

Maria: Understood. Let's **bite the bullet** [accept the hard part] and start today.

IDIOMS THAT DO NOT TRANSLATE LITERALLY

These fixed phrases trip up even advanced speakers. Learn the exact form:

- It is *touch base*, never "touch *the* base" or "touch bases".
- We say *on the same page*, not "in the same page".
- It is *a ballpark figure*, not "a ball-park number" or "a stadium figure".
- *Think outside the box*—never "think out of the box" in most contexts, and never "think outside *of* the box".
- *Get the ball rolling*, not "roll the ball" or "make the ball roll".
- We keep someone *in the loop*, not "into the loop" or "on the loop".
- It is *back to the drawing board*, not "back to the drawing table".
- A *win-win* situation, not "a win and win" or "a double win".

WATCH THE WRONG-VERB ERROR

Many errors come from translating a verb directly from your first language. Remember: you *hold* (not "make" or "do") a meeting; you *take* (not "write") minutes informally, though "write up the minutes" is fine; you *meet* (not "reach" or "achieve") a deadline; you *raise* (not "rise") concerns. *Rise* has no object ("prices rise"); *raise* always takes one ("we raise prices").

6. Exercise: match and complete

Part A — Match the idiom to the situation. Choose the best idiom (1–6) for each situation (a–f).

Idioms: (1) low-hanging fruit · (2) back to the drawing board · (3) on the same page · (4) cut corners · (5) a game changer · (6) red tape

1. The whole prototype failed and the team must start the design again. ____
2. A new technology will completely transform how the industry works. ____
3. The manager wants to be sure everyone understands the plan the same way. ____
4. To save time, a supplier skipped quality checks—and it showed. ____
5. The team picks the quick, easy tasks first to show fast progress. ____
6. Endless permits and paperwork are delaying the new branch opening. ____

Part B — Complete the collocation with the correct verb: *make, meet, hold, reach, close, raise, drive*.

1. We hope to _____ an agreement before lunch.
2. Can we _____ a meeting on Thursday morning?
3. Several employees wanted to _____ concerns about safety.
4. If we work overtime, we can _____ the deadline.
5. The sales team finally _____ the deal yesterday.
6. Strong exports continue to _____ growth.
7. The committee will _____ a decision next week.

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1 → (2) back to the drawing board; 2 → (5) a game changer; 3 → (3) on the same page; 4 → (4) cut corners; 5 → (1) low-hanging fruit; 6 → (6) red tape.

Part B: 1 reach · 2 hold · 3 raise · 4 meet · 5 closed (close) · 6 drive · 7 make.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- Learn nouns with their partner verbs and adjectives, never alone—collocations are the quickest route to natural English.
- Recognise every idiom you meet; deploy them lightly and in the exact fixed form.
- Treat buzzwords as seasoning, not the meal. When plain words say it clearly, choose the plain words.
- Clarity is the real mark of fluency. The best business communicators are understood by everyone in the room.

Professional Emails & Messaging

Writing emails that are clear, courteous, and get a response

Email is still the workhorse of professional communication. A good message respects the reader's time, makes a single clear request, and is polite without being stiff. A poor one buries the point, sounds demanding, or never arrives because the subject line said nothing. This chapter gives you a practical system: how to write subject lines that get opened, how to choose greetings and sign-offs that match the situation, how to open and close, and how to keep your tone warm and professional. You will also find large phrase banks you can borrow from directly, three fully annotated sample emails, and an exercise to test what you have learned.

1. Subject lines that work

The subject line is the first thing your reader sees and often the only thing they read before deciding whether to open, ignore, or delete. A strong subject line is specific, short (about six to ten words), and tells the reader what the email is about and what you want. Vague subjects such as "Question" or "Hi" compete with dozens of other messages and usually lose.

Lead with the topic, then add an action word or a date if there is a deadline. If you need something by Friday, say so. If you are simply sharing information, signal that too, so the reader knows it does not require an urgent reply.

AVOID

✗ Subject: Quick question

BETTER

✓ Subject: Approval needed: Q3 budget by Fri 27 June

SUBJECT LINE PATTERNS BY PURPOSE

Purpose	Phrase
Request / action	Action needed: sign-off on the supplier contract
Deadline	Reminder: timesheets due Friday 27 June
Information only	FYI: new office access cards from Monday
Meeting	Proposed time: project kick-off, Tue 1 July, 10:00
Follow-up	Following up: invoice #4521 (sent 12 June)
Reply expected	Your input needed: three options for the venue

TIP

Abbreviations help busy readers. **FYI** ("for your information") signals no reply is needed. **EOD** means "end of day", **COB** means "close of business", and **NRN** means "no reply needed". Use them only when you are sure your reader understands them.

2. Greetings & sign-offs by formality

The way you open and close an email sets the tone for everything in between. The right choice depends on how well you know the reader, your relationship, and the culture of your organisation. When in doubt, start slightly more formal than you think you need to; you can relax once the other person sets the tone.

Choosing a greeting

GREETINGS FROM MOST TO LEAST FORMAL

Purpose	Phrase
Name unknown (very formal)	Dear Sir or Madam,
Named, formal	Dear Mr Lee, / Dear Ms Adeyemi, / Dear Dr Khan,
Named, neutral business	Dear Anna, / Hello Anna,

Purpose	Phrase
Colleague, friendly	Hi Anna, / Hi James,
A group	Hello team, / Hi all, / Dear colleagues,

A few cautions. Use *Ms* for women unless you know they prefer *Mrs* or *Miss*. Avoid guessing gender from a name you do not recognise; if you cannot tell, use the full name, as in *Dear Sam Taylor*. *Dear Sir or Madam*, is correct but impersonal, so spend two minutes finding a name when you can. Note that in international English a comma after the greeting is standard; American writers may use a colon in very formal letters.

Choosing a sign-off

Sign-offs follow their own rules of etiquette, and one in particular trips people up. In British usage, *Yours faithfully* closes a letter that began with *Dear Sir or Madam* (no name), while *Yours sincerely* closes one that began with a name. Most everyday business email now uses something warmer in between.

SIGN-OFFS FROM MOST TO LEAST FORMAL

Purpose	Phrase
Formal, no name used	Yours faithfully,
Formal, name used	Yours sincerely,
Standard business (safe default)	Kind regards, / Best regards,
Warm but professional	Best wishes, / With thanks,
Friendly colleague	Best, / Thanks, / Cheers,

NOTE

Cheers is friendly and common in British and Australian workplaces, but it can read as too casual to a senior client or a contact in a more formal culture. *Kind regards* is the reliable middle ground: warm enough for almost anyone, formal enough for almost any situation.

3. Opening lines

After the greeting, your first sentence should orient the reader. Strong openings do one of three things: they state your purpose, they refer to something the reader already knows, or they follow up on previous contact. A short courtesy line is welcome, but do not let pleasantries delay the point. By the end of your first short paragraph, the reader should know why you are writing.

OPENING LINES BY FUNCTION

Purpose	Phrase
State purpose	I'm writing to ask about... / I'd like to confirm...
Refer to contact	Thank you for your email about... / Further to our call yesterday,...
Refer to a document	With reference to the proposal you sent,...
Follow up	I'm following up on my message of 12 June about...
Warm opener (known contact)	I hope you're well. / I hope you had a good weekend.
First contact	I'm reaching out because... / We haven't met, but...

4. The body: one ask, clear structure

The single most useful rule for business email is **one email, one ask**. If you raise five unrelated points, the reader will answer the easy one and forget the rest. Keep each email focused on one main request or topic, and if you genuinely have several, number them so none gets lost.

Structure the body so a busy reader can skim it. Put the most important sentence first. Use short paragraphs of two to four lines. When you list items, actions, or questions, use bullet points so they stand out from the surrounding text. White space is your friend: a wall of text gets postponed; a clean, scannable message gets answered.

KEY IDEA

Make the action obvious. A reader should be able to answer the question "What do they want me to do, and by when?" after a single read. If they cannot, your email needs editing, not the reader's patience.

AVOID

✗ There are a few things I wanted to raise and also I was wondering whether the report is ready and we should probably talk about the budget too at some point.

BETTER

✓ Could you please confirm two things by Thursday?
1. Is the Q3 report ready to share?
2. Are you free for a 30-minute budget call this week?

5. Closing lines & calls to action

The closing line is where you make the next step explicit. Tell the reader exactly what you would like them to do and, where relevant, when. A clear call to action is courteous: it removes guesswork. Finish with a brief sign-off line that thanks the reader or offers further help.

CLOSING LINES AND CALLS TO ACTION

Purpose	Phrase
Request action	Could you let me know by Friday, please?
Offer help	Do let me know if you have any questions.
Invite a reply	I look forward to hearing from you.
Soften a deadline	If that's not possible, just let me know what works.
Express thanks	Thanks in advance for your help with this.
Keep the door open	Happy to discuss further if that would help.

6. Phrase banks by purpose

Below are ready-made phrases for the situations you will meet most often. Choose the level of formality that fits your reader, and adapt the details. Notice how many phrases use *could*, *would*, and *please* to stay polite.

MAKING REQUESTS

Purpose	Phrase
Polite standard request	Could you please send me the latest figures?
Very polite / formal	I would be grateful if you could review the draft.
Asking a favour	Would you mind taking a quick look at this?
Checking possibility	Is there any chance you could finish it by Friday?
Requesting feedback	I'd welcome your thoughts on the attached.

GIVING INFORMATION

Purpose	Phrase
Neutral update	I wanted to update you on the project status.
Sharing news	I'm pleased to let you know that the order has shipped.
Flagging a point	Please note that the office will be closed on Monday.
Adding detail	For your reference, the figures are broken down below.
Delivering a result	As requested, here is the summary of last month's sales.

ATTACHING FILES

Purpose	Phrase
Standard attachment	Please find the report attached.
Natural alternative	I've attached the contract for your review.

Purpose	Phrase
Pointing to content	You'll find the pricing on page two of the attachment.
Large or shared file	The file was too large to attach, so here is a link instead.
Forgotten attachment fix	Apologies, I forgot the attachment — here it is.

APOLOGISING

Purpose	Phrase
Light apology	Sorry for the slow reply.
Standard apology	I apologise for the delay in getting back to you.
Apology for an error	I'm sorry for the confusion this has caused.
Taking responsibility	This was our oversight, and we'll put it right.
Apology + action	Please accept my apologies; I'll send the corrected version today.

CHASING A REPLY

Purpose	Phrase
Gentle nudge	I just wanted to follow up on my email below.
Polite reminder	I appreciate you're busy — could you let me know your thoughts?
Checking it arrived	I wanted to make sure my previous message reached you.
Restating the ask	To recap, I need your approval before we can proceed.
Setting a soft deadline	If I don't hear back by Wednesday, I'll assume the date works.

DECLINING POLITELY

Purpose	Phrase
Soften the refusal	Thank you for thinking of me, but I'm afraid I can't this time.
Give a reason	Unfortunately, my schedule is full this week.
Offer an alternative	I can't make Tuesday, but Thursday would work well.
Decline a request	I'm not able to take this on right now, regrettably.
Keep the relationship	I hope we can find another way to work together soon.

SCHEDULING

Purpose	Phrase
Propose a time	Would Tuesday at 10:00 suit you?
Offer options	I'm free on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon — which is better?
Ask availability	When would be a good time for a quick call?
Reschedule	Could we move our meeting to later in the week?
Confirm a slot	That works for me — I'll send a calendar invite.

CONFIRMING

Purpose	Phrase
Confirm receipt	Thanks — I can confirm I've received your documents.
Confirm an arrangement	Just to confirm, we're meeting at 14:00 on Thursday.
Confirm agreement	That all sounds good; please go ahead.
Confirm next steps	To summarise next steps, I'll draft the plan and you'll review it.
Acknowledge	Noted, thank you — I'll action this today.

7. Tone & politeness

In English, politeness often comes from **softeners**: small words and structures that take the hard edge off a request. Compare *"Send me the file"* with *"Could you send me the file, please?"* The meaning is the same, but the second invites cooperation rather than commands it. Modal verbs (*could, would*), the word *please*, and qualifiers such as *just, a quick*, and *if possible* all soften tone.

Used carefully, *just* makes a request feel smaller and friendlier — *"I just wanted to check..."*. Be aware, though, that too many softeners can make you sound unsure, so save them for moments when politeness matters most. Match the warmth of your tone to the reader: a long-standing colleague does not need the full formal apparatus, while a new client does.

COMMON EMAIL MISTAKES

Avoid these traps, which damage tone and reduce your chances of a reply:

- **No subject line**, or one so vague the email is never opened.
- **Too long**. A reader who has to scroll often replies "later" and forgets.
- **A demanding tone**. "I need this now" reads as rude; "Could you send this today, please?" does not.
- **An unclear ask**. If the reader cannot tell what you want, they will not act.
- **WRITING IN ALL CAPITALS**, which reads as shouting. Use *bold* sparingly for emphasis instead.
- **Reply All by reflex**. Ask whether everyone really needs your "Thanks!" — usually they do not.

REPLY-ALL ETIQUETTE

Reply only to the people who need your message. Use **Reply All** when the whole group genuinely needs the information; use plain **Reply** for everything else. Put people who only need to be aware in **Cc**, and use **Bcc** to protect addresses when emailing a large group who do not know one another. Moving someone out of a thread? Say so politely: *"Moving Anna to Bcc to spare her inbox."*

8. Three annotated sample emails

The following examples put the principles together. Read each subject line, opening, body, call to action, and sign-off as a complete, working unit.

Sample 1 — A request to a client

Subject: Information needed: brand assets for the June campaign

To: r.santos@brightside.com

Dear Mr Santos,

I hope you're well. I'm writing to ask for a few materials so we can begin work on your June campaign on schedule.

Could you please send the following by Friday 26 June?

1. Your logo in high resolution (PNG or vector)
2. The brand colour codes you'd like us to use
3. Any product photos you'd like featured

If anything isn't ready, just let me know and we'll work around it. Do feel free to call if it's easier to talk it through.

Thanks in advance for your help. I look forward to getting started.

Kind regards,

Elena Marquez

Account Manager, Northlight Studio

Why it works: the subject names the topic and the need; the opening states the purpose in one line; the request is a single, numbered ask with a clear deadline; the closing softens the demand and offers an alternative; the sign-off is warm but professional.

Sample 2 – A polite chaser / follow-up

Subject: Following up: proposal for the website redesign (sent 9 June)

To: j.okoro@meridian.co

Hi Jane,

I just wanted to follow up on the proposal I sent on 9 June. I know things get busy, so this is only a gentle nudge.

To recap, the proposal covers the redesign timeline and a fixed price of £8,400. We'd need your go-ahead by the end of next week to keep the August launch date.

Could you let me know if you have any questions, or whether you'd like to talk it through on a quick call? I'm happy to adjust anything that isn't quite right.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Tom Reilly

Meridian Digital

Why it works: it refers clearly to the earlier email and date; it acknowledges the reader is busy before asking again; it restates the key point and the real deadline; and it offers an easy next step rather than simply repeating "any update?".

Sample 3 – An apology for a delay

Subject: Update and apology: your order #5582

To: orders-team@kepler-foods.com

Dear Ms Tanaka,

I'm writing about order #5582, and I'm sorry to say it will arrive later than promised. Please accept my apologies for the delay and for any disruption it causes.

The cause was a supplier shortage on our side, which was our oversight to manage better. We now expect to dispatch your order on 24 June, with delivery two days later.

To make up for the inconvenience, we've applied a 10% credit to your account, which you'll see on your next invoice.

Thank you for your patience. If you'd like me to prioritise any part of the order, just let me know and I'll arrange it straight away.

Yours sincerely,

David Olsen

Customer Care Lead, Kepler Foods

Why it works: it apologises early and clearly; it takes responsibility without long excuses; it gives a concrete new date and a gesture of goodwill; and it closes by offering further help. Because it opened with a name, it correctly closes with *Yours sincerely*.

9. Exercise: fix the email

The email below breaks several of the rules in this chapter. Rewrite it to be clearer and more courteous. Think about the subject line, the tone, the structure of the request, and the call to action. Then check the model answer.

Subject: Hi

SEND ME THE SALES NUMBERS. Also did you book the room and what about the new starter forms and can you call the printer. I need everything today.

Paul

Part B. Choose the more appropriate phrase for a polite request to a client you do not know well:

1. (a) "Get this done by Friday." (b) "Could you have this ready by Friday, please?"
2. (a) "I would be grateful if you could review the draft." (b) "Review the draft."
3. (a) "Sorry for the slow reply, mate." (b) "I apologise for the delay in getting back to you."

ANSWER KEY

Part A — model rewrite

Subject: Three quick tasks for today — sales figures, room & forms

Hi Sam,

I'm sorry to land several things on you at once, but could you help with three items by end of day, please?

1. Send me the latest sales figures.
2. Confirm whether the meeting room is booked.
3. Send the new-starter forms when you have them.

I'll call the printer myself, so don't worry about that one. Do let me know if today isn't realistic and we'll re-prioritise.

Thanks very much,

Paul

Improvements: a specific subject line replaces "Hi"; the shouted capitals become a polite request; the jumble of tasks becomes a numbered list with one deadline; the sender removes one task from the reader's plate and offers flexibility on timing.

Part B

1. (b) 2. (a) 3. (b) — option (b) in each pair is polite and suitably professional for a client you do not know well.

Master these patterns and your emails will do three things at once: respect the reader's time, protect your professional tone, and make the next step easy to take. That combination — clear, courteous, and easy to act on — is exactly what gets you a response.

Meetings: Leading and Taking Part

The language to open, steer, contribute to, and close any meeting with confidence

Few situations test your English under pressure quite like a meeting. You have to listen, think, and speak almost at once, often in front of senior colleagues and clients. The good news is that meetings are highly predictable: they follow recognisable stages, and each stage has its own ready-made language. Once you can recognise the stage you are in, the right phrase is usually only a sentence away. This chapter gives you that language — for chairing a meeting and for taking part in one — together with the diplomatic skills that make the difference between sounding blunt and sounding professional.

Whether you are the **chair** running the agenda or a participant fighting for a fair turn to speak, your aim is the same: to be clear, to be heard, and to be courteous. We will work through the meeting from start to finish — opening, agenda, contributions, agreeing and disagreeing, interrupting, clarifying, time-keeping, summarising, and closing — and finish with the core vocabulary, a worked dialogue, and an exercise.

1. Opening the meeting and stating objectives

A meeting that starts well usually ends well. The chair's first job is to settle the room, welcome people, and make the purpose crystal clear. Even in an informal stand-up, a single sentence stating the objective keeps everyone pointed in the same direction.

OPENING A MEETING & STATING OBJECTIVES

Function	Useful phrases
Welcoming & starting	Right, shall we get started? · Thanks for coming, everyone. · Let's make a start, as we're all here. · Good morning. I think we can begin.
Introducing people	For those who haven't met, this is Priya from Finance. · I'd like to welcome Marco, who's joining us today.
Stating the objective	The purpose of today's meeting is to... · What we need to achieve today is... · By the end of this call, I'd like us to have agreed on... · The main thing on the table is...
Housekeeping	We have an hour, so let's keep things tight. · Could you put yourselves on mute when you're not speaking? · I'll share my screen in a moment.

TIP: NAME THE OUTCOME, NOT JUST THE TOPIC

Compare “Today we're talking about the budget” with “Today we need to *agree* the Q3 budget and *decide* who owns each line.” Stating the outcome — a decision, an agreement, a plan — tells people what a successful meeting looks like and discourages aimless discussion.

2. Setting and agreeing the agenda

The **agenda** is the list of items to be discussed, usually in order. Sharing it early lets people prepare; confirming it at the start lets people add anything missing before the clock starts running.

SETTING & AGREEING THE AGENDA

Function	Useful phrases
Presenting the agenda	You should all have the agenda in front of you. · There are three items today. · I've put the most urgent point first.
Confirming order & time	I suggest we take these in order. · Let's give item two the most time. · Does the running order work for everyone?
Adding / removing items	Is there anything anyone would like to add? · Shall we leave point four for next time? · Can we park that and pick it up under AOB?
Agreeing the agenda	If everyone's happy, let's get going. · Are we agreed on the agenda? · Good — let's start with the first item.

3. Inviting contributions and managing turn-taking

A good chair pulls people in rather than letting the loudest voice dominate. Quiet experts often have the most useful things to say; your phrasing can give them a clear, low-pressure opening. Equally, you sometimes need to bring a long contribution gently to a close so that others can speak.

INVITING CONTRIBUTIONS

Function	Useful phrases
Opening the floor	What are everyone's thoughts on this? · I'd like to hear from everyone before we decide.
Inviting a named person	Anya, you've worked on this — what's your view? · Could we hear from Sales on this point? · Tom, did you want to come in here?
Drawing in the quiet	We haven't heard from you yet, Lena — any thoughts? · Is there anything you'd like to add before we move on?

MANAGING TURN-TAKING

Function	Useful phrases
Giving someone the floor	Go ahead, Sam. · You first, then Maria. · Let's let Raj finish his point.
Holding the floor	If I could just finish my thought... · Let me come back to that in a second. · I'll be brief, then I'll hand over.
Closing one turn, opening another	Thanks, that's helpful — Carla, what do you think? · Let's park that and hear another view.
Managing overlap	One at a time, if we can. · Sorry, you go — I jumped in. · Let's take Priya first, then Omar.

4. Giving opinions: strong, neutral, and tentative

How sure you sound should match how sure you actually are — and how much weight you want your view to carry. English lets you turn the volume up or down. A **strong** opinion commits you and invites debate; a **tentative** one floats an idea while leaving room to retreat. Mixing the registers makes you sound thoughtful rather than either timid or domineering.

GIVING OPINIONS AT THREE STRENGTHS

Function	Useful phrases
Strong	I'm convinced that... · There's no doubt in my mind that... · I strongly believe we should... · The way I see it, we have to...
Neutral	I think... · In my view... · My feeling is that... · As far as I'm concerned... · I'd say that...
Tentative	I'm not sure, but maybe we could... · It might be worth... · I tend to think... · Perhaps one option would be to... · Could it be that...?

NOTE: HEDGING IS A SKILL, NOT A WEAKNESS

Words such as *perhaps*, *might*, *it seems* and *I tend to* are called *hedges*. Far from making you sound unsure, used deliberately they signal that you are open to discussion — valuable when you are challenging a senior colleague or floating an early idea. Save your strong language for the points that truly matter.

5. Agreeing and disagreeing — the diplomacy spectrum

This is the heart of meeting language. Most disagreements in business are not about *whether* people disagree but about *how* they show it. Handled badly, disagreement feels like an attack; handled well, it feels like a contribution. Think of agreement and disagreement as a spectrum, from **strong agreement** through **partial agreement** to **polite disagreement** and, rarely, **strong disagreement**.

THE AGREEMENT-DISAGREEMENT SPECTRUM

Function	Useful phrases
Strongly agree	Absolutely. · I couldn't agree more. · That's exactly my view. · You've hit the nail on the head.

Function	Useful phrases
Agree	I agree. · That makes sense to me. · Yes, I think you're right. · Good point.
Partly agree	I agree up to a point. · I take your point, but... · That's true, although... · I'm with you on the first part, less so on the second.
Politely disagree	I'm not sure I see it that way. · I see what you mean, but have we considered...? · I'd look at it slightly differently. · With respect, I think there's another angle.
Strongly disagree	I really can't agree with that. · I'm afraid I have to disagree. · I have serious reservations about that approach.

The most useful skill is **diplomatic disagreement**: softening the blow so the other person stays open. Three techniques do most of the work. First, *acknowledge before you object* — show you heard them (“I take your point...”) before you push back. Second, *soften with a hedge* — “I'm not sure that...” lands far more gently than a flat “That's wrong.” Third, *attack the idea, not the person* — talk about “the plan” or “that approach,” never “your mistake.”

Don't: No, that's wrong. The numbers don't work and you know it. **Do:** I see where you're coming from, but I'm not sure the numbers quite add up — could we look at the Q3 figures again?

WARNING: PHRASES THAT SOUND RUDER THAN YOU MEAN

Several common phrases feel neutral to a non-native speaker but sound abrupt or aggressive to native ears. Use the softer version instead.

- “You are wrong.” → “I see it a bit differently.”
- “That's a bad idea.” → “I have a few concerns about that.”
- “No.” (alone) → “I'm not sure that would work, because...”
- “You don't understand.” → “Perhaps I didn't explain it clearly — let me try again.”
- “What do you want?” → “How can we best help here?”

6. Interrupting and handling interruptions

In a fast meeting you will sometimes need to break in — to correct a fact, add a point, or stop a tangent. Done politely, interrupting is acceptable; the trick is to signal it first and keep it short. You also need phrases to defend your own turn when someone cuts across you.

INTERRUPTING & HANDLING INTERRUPTIONS

Function	Useful phrases
Polite interruption	Sorry to jump in, but... · Can I add something here? · If I could come in for a second... · Just a quick point on that...
Urgent interruption	Sorry, before we move on — this is important. · Can I stop you there? I think there's an issue.
Holding off an interruption	Could I just finish this point? · Let me get to the end — then it's all yours. · Bear with me one second.
Accepting an interruption	Sure, go ahead. · Yes, what were you going to say? · Of course — you first.

TIP FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS: INTERRUPT AND BUY THINKING TIME

Two problems hit non-native speakers in meetings: you can't find a gap to speak, and when you do, you need a moment to organise your English. Solve both with a short opener. To *break in*, say the person's name plus “*sorry, can I just...*” — the name reliably wins their attention. To *buy thinking time* once you have the floor, lead with a filler phrase that is correct and natural: “*That's a good question...*”, “*Let me think for a second...*”, “*So, the way I see it...*”, or “*There are really two things here...*”. These buy you three or four seconds to assemble your sentence — and they sound like confident chairing, not hesitation.

7. Asking for clarification

Asking someone to repeat or explain is a sign of engagement, not weakness. It is far cheaper to clarify in the meeting than to act on a misunderstanding afterwards. Phrase your question so it puts the burden on the explanation, not on the speaker's competence.

ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

Function	Useful phrases
Asking to repeat	Sorry, could you say that again? · I didn't quite catch that. · Could you repeat the last part?
Asking to explain	What exactly do you mean by “rollout”? · Could you expand on that a little? · Can you give us an example?
Checking understanding	So, if I understand you correctly, ...? · Do you mean that...? · Let me make sure I've got this right...
Confirming back	So the plan is... — is that right? · Just to confirm, we're saying...

8. Keeping on track and managing time

Meetings drift. Side topics, war stories, and pet concerns all pull the discussion off course, and the chair is responsible for steering it back without seeming to silence anyone. The polite move is to acknowledge the point, then defer it — often to **AOB** or a follow-up.

KEEPING ON TRACK & MANAGING TIME

Function	Useful phrases
Returning to the point	Let's come back to the main question. · That's a separate issue — can we park it for now? · Interesting, but slightly off-topic.
Deferring a topic	Let's take that offline. · Shall we pick that up under AOB? · Can we add that to next week's agenda?
Watching the clock	We're running short on time. · Let's spend five more minutes on this, then move on. · In the interest of time, let's decide.
Moving on	Right, let's move on to the next item. · If there's nothing else on this, shall we proceed? · Let's leave it there and turn to...

9. Summarising, action points, and assigning tasks

The most valuable minute of any meeting is the last one, where the chair summarises what was decided and confirms who does what by when. A clear **action item** names an owner and a deadline; without both, nothing happens. Summarising as you go — at the end of each item, not only at the very end — keeps everyone aligned.

SUMMARISING & ACTION POINTS

Function	Useful phrases
Summarising a point	So, to sum up this item... · Let me recap where we've got to. · The key takeaway here is...
Confirming a decision	So we've agreed to... · The decision, then, is... · Are we all happy with that as the outcome?
Listing action points	Let me run through the action items. · There are three things to take away. · For the record, the next steps are...

ASSIGNING TASKS & DEADLINES

Function	Useful phrases
Assigning an owner	Marco, could you take this one? · Can I leave that with you, Priya? · Who'd be willing to own this?
Setting a deadline	Could we have that by Friday? · Let's aim for end of next week. · When can you realistically get this done?
Confirming & following up	Great — so you'll send it round by Thursday. · I'll follow up by email with the actions. · Let's check progress at the next meeting.

10. Closing the meeting

Close cleanly: confirm the actions, set the next date if there is one, thank people, and stop. A crisp ending leaves a professional impression and sends everyone away clear about what happens next.

CLOSING THE MEETING

Function	Useful phrases
Signalling the end	I think that covers everything. · Unless there's anything else, let's wrap up. · Any other business before we close?
Confirming next steps	You'll all get the minutes by tomorrow. · The next meeting is on the 27th. · I'll circulate the action list this afternoon.
Thanking & finishing	Thanks, everyone — that was productive. · I appreciate your time. · Have a good rest of the day. · That's it from me.

11. The vocabulary of meetings

A handful of terms appear in almost every professional meeting, especially the formal ones. Learn them precisely — one or two carry a difference between British and American usage that can cause real confusion.

CORE MEETING VOCABULARY

Term	Meaning
agenda	The ordered list of items to be discussed.
minutes	The official written record of what was said and decided.
AOB	“Any Other Business” — the slot at the end for items not on the agenda.
action item	A specific task assigned to a named person with a deadline; also called an action point .
chair	The person who runs the meeting (also used as a verb: <i>to chair</i> a meeting).
quorum	The minimum number of people who must be present for decisions to be valid.
to table a topic	BrE: to bring an item forward <i>for</i> discussion now. AmE: to <i>postpone</i> or set an item aside — the opposite meaning. Because of this clash, prefer “let's discuss” or “let's postpone” in international meetings.
to adjourn	To pause or end the meeting, often to continue later.
follow-up	Action or communication after the meeting to check progress or complete tasks.
to park / take offline	To set a topic aside to deal with separately, outside the meeting.

KEY POINT

The verb *to table* means opposite things in British and American English. In the UK, “to table a proposal” means to *raise* it now; in the US, it means to *shelve* it. In any cross-border meeting, avoid the word and say exactly what you mean: “Let's discuss this now” or “Let's leave this for later.”

12. A meeting in action

Here is a short excerpt from a project meeting. Notice how the chair opens, invites a contribution, manages a polite disagreement, and summarises with a clear action point.

Chair: Right, shall we get started? Thanks for coming. The purpose today is to decide whether we push the launch to October. Dani, you've been close to the testing — what's your view?

Dani: Thanks. Honestly, I'm convinced we're not ready for September. We still have two critical bugs open, and rushing would risk the customer experience.

Marco: Sorry to jump in — I take your point about the bugs, Dani, but I'm not sure a full month's delay is the answer. Could we look at a phased release instead?

Dani: I see where you're coming from. A phased release could work, although the two bugs affect the core flow, so they'd hit phase one anyway.

Chair: Good point. So, if I understand you both correctly: we agree the bugs are blocking, but we disagree on whether the whole launch slips or just part of it. Is that fair?

Marco: Yes, that's a fair summary.

Chair: Then let's do this. Dani, could you scope how long the two bugs really take to fix — by Thursday? Once we have that, we'll decide between a phased release and a full delay. I'll add it to next week's agenda and circulate the action by email. Anything else on this? No? Then let's move on.

In nine short turns the chair has run an entire decision cycle: a clear objective, a named invitation, a polite disagreement handled without friction, a neutral summary that names the area of agreement *and* the area of conflict, and a single owned action with a deadline. That is what good meeting English looks like in practice.

13. Exercise

Part A — Choose the more diplomatic phrase. For each pair, pick the version that sounds polite and professional in an international meeting.

1. (a) “No, that's wrong.” / (b) “I'm not sure I see it that way.”
2. (a) “Say it again.” / (b) “Sorry, could you say that again?”
3. (a) “Sorry to jump in, but could I add something?” / (b) “Stop — listen to me.”
4. (a) “That's a bad idea.” / (b) “I have a few concerns about that.”
5. (a) “You don't understand.” / (b) “Perhaps I didn't explain that clearly — let me try again.”

Part B — Reorder the stages of a meeting. Put these stages into the natural order, from first to last.

1. Confirm action points and assign owners
2. Open the meeting and state the objective
3. Close the meeting and thank everyone
4. Agree the agenda
5. Discuss the agenda items and invite contributions
6. Summarise decisions

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1 (b); 2 (b); 3 (a); 4 (b); 5 (b). In each case the chosen phrase acknowledges the other person and softens the message, attacking the idea rather than the person.

Part B: The natural order is: 2 (open & state objective) → 4 (agree the agenda) → 5b/5 (discuss items & invite contributions) → 6 (summarise decisions) → 1 (confirm action points & owners) → 3 (close & thank). In the list above that is: **2, 4, 5, 6, 1, 3.**

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- Meetings follow predictable stages; recognise the stage and the right phrase follows.
- State the *outcome*, not just the topic, when you open.
- Match the strength of your opinion to your real certainty — and hedge on purpose.
- Disagree on a spectrum: acknowledge, soften, and target the idea, not the person.
- Signal before you interrupt, and use filler openers to buy thinking time.
- End every item with a summary; end every meeting with owned actions and deadlines.
- Avoid “table” in international meetings — say “discuss now” or “postpone.”

Presentations That Persuade

Structuring, signposting, and delivering a presentation in confident English

A presentation is not a document that you read aloud. It is a guided journey, and you are the guide. Your audience cannot rewind you, skim ahead, or check a footnote; they can only follow the path you mark out for them in real time. This is why the best business presenters are not those with the largest vocabulary or the most beautiful slides — they are those who make their structure audible. In this chapter you will learn how to build a talk that holds attention from the first sentence, how to use **signposting** language so listeners always know where they are, and how to handle the moment many speakers fear most: the questions at the end.

The shape of a persuasive talk

Almost every effective business presentation follows the same underlying shape, whatever the topic. Memorise this shape and you will never again stand in front of a room wondering what comes next.

1. **The opening hook** — a question, a surprising figure, a short story, or a bold claim that earns attention in the first thirty seconds.
2. **Self-introduction & topic** — who you are, what you will talk about, and why it matters to *this* audience.
3. **The agenda** — a clear preview of how the talk is divided.
4. **The body** — usually two to four main sections, each clearly opened and closed.
5. **Signposted transitions** — the connective phrases that move the audience from one section to the next.
6. **The conclusion** — a summary of the key message and a clear call to action.
7. **Questions & answers** — the chance to address concerns and reinforce your message.

Think of the body as the cargo and the signposting as the rails. Without rails, even excellent cargo arrives nowhere. A useful old rule from public speaking still holds: *tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them*. Repetition of the core message is not redundancy — it is how spoken information becomes memorable. A reader can return to a paragraph; a listener cannot, so the speaker must do the work of reminding for them.

Notice that this shape is deliberately simple. Under the pressure of a real audience — bright lights, unfamiliar faces, perhaps a second language — your working memory shrinks. A complicated, clever structure is exactly the thing you will forget. The professionals who appear most spontaneous are almost always the ones following the plainest framework, because a plain framework frees their attention for the audience rather than for themselves. Learn the seven stages above so well that you no longer have to think about them, and you will be free to think about the people in front of you.

THE SIGNPOST-THEN-CONTENT HABIT

In writing, the detail can come before the label. In speech, reverse it: *announce* the move, then make it. Say “Let me give you one example” *before* the example, not after. This tiny habit — signpost first, content second — gives the listener a mental folder to drop your next sentence into. It is the single most powerful thing you can do to sound organised in English.

Opening: earning the first thirty seconds

The opening does two jobs at once. It must capture attention (the hook) and it must orient the audience (introduction, topic, agenda). Resist the temptation to begin with apologies (“Sorry, I’m a bit nervous”) or with throat-clearing (“So, erm, I guess we can probably start”). Begin instead with energy and intent. The first words you speak set the audience’s expectation of how much attention you deserve; spend them wisely.

A few hooks work reliably across cultures and topics. A **surprising statistic** creates an instant gap between what people assumed and what is true. A **short, relevant story** — thirty seconds, one person, one moment — lets the audience feel the problem before you analyse it. A **provocative question** invites them to take a private position, so they are already engaged before you have made a single claim. Whatever you choose, the hook must connect directly to your topic; a clever opening that has nothing to do with your message merely confuses people. Deliver it from memory, looking at the room, not down at your notes.

WELCOMING THE AUDIENCE & INTRODUCING YOURSELF

Stage	Signposting language
Greeting	Good morning, everyone, and thank you for coming. / Welcome, and thank you for making the time today.
Introduce yourself	For those who don't know me, I'm... / Let me quickly introduce myself. I'm Maria, and I head up...
Your role / credibility	I've spent the last five years working on... / My team is responsible for...

STATING THE TOPIC & OBJECTIVE

Stage	Signposting language
The topic	Today I'd like to talk to you about... / The subject of my presentation is...
The objective	By the end of this session, you'll be able to... / My aim today is to convince you that...
Why it matters	This matters because... / This is relevant to all of us, because...
Timing & questions	I'll speak for about twenty minutes, and we'll leave time for questions at the end.

OUTLINING THE STRUCTURE (THE AGENDA)

Stage	Signposting language
Number of parts	I've divided my talk into three parts. / There are three things I want to cover today.
Listing the parts	First, I'll look at... Then I'll move on to... And finally, I'll...
Setting expectations	I'd ask you to hold your questions until the end. / Please feel free to interrupt me at any point.

The body: clear sections, clean transitions

Inside the body, treat each section as a mini-presentation with its own opening and closing. The audience should always be able to answer two silent questions: "Which part are we in?" and "How does this connect to the last part?" Transitions answer both. A good transition closes the previous idea, names the next one, and shows the relationship between them.

STARTING A SECTION

Stage	Signposting language
Open the section	Let's start with... / I'd like to begin by looking at...
Frame the point	The first thing to understand is... / What's important here is...

MOVING ON & TRANSITIONS

Stage	Signposting language
Close & move on	So that's the background. Now let's turn to... / Having looked at the problem, let me move on to the solution.
Next point	This brings me to my next point... / Moving on to... / Let's now consider...
Digress & return	Just a quick aside... / But let's come back to the main point.
Refer back	As I mentioned earlier... / You'll remember that at the start I said...

Referring to visuals and data

Slides, charts, and figures should support your spoken words, not replace them. When you bring up a visual, tell the audience where to look and what to notice — then let them read it for a moment in silence. Keep your descriptions short; the detailed language of trends, percentages, and comparisons is covered in the chapter on numbers and data.

REFERRING TO VISUALS

Stage	Signposting language
Introduce a visual	If you look at this slide... / Let's take a look at the next chart.
Direct attention	As you can see from this chart... / I'd like to draw your attention to the figure on the right.
State what it shows	This graph shows... / These figures highlight... / What this tells us is...

Stage	Signposting language
Point to the trend	There's a clear upward trend here. / The key takeaway is the sharp rise after Q2.

SHORT AND POINTED

A visual usually carries one message. Say that message in one sentence (“Sales doubled in twelve months”) before you discuss the detail. If a chart needs three sentences just to explain what it is, it is too complicated for a presentation — simplify it.

Emphasising, exemplifying, and summarising

Not all of your sentences carry equal weight. Use signposting to mark the important ones, so they stand out from the supporting detail. Telling the audience “this is the crucial point” gives them permission to relax during the detail and concentrate at the key moment.

EMPHASISING KEY POINTS

Stage	Signposting language
Flag importance	The key point here is... / If you remember one thing from today, let it be this...
Stress & repeat	I really want to emphasise this. / Let me say that again, because it matters.

GIVING EXAMPLES

Stage	Signposting language
Introduce example	Let me give you an example. / To illustrate this, take the case of...
A concrete instance	For instance... / A good example of this is... / Take, for example...

SUMMARISING ALONG THE WAY

Stage	Signposting language
Mini-summary	So, to recap that section... / In short, what we've seen so far is...
Restate simply	In other words... / Put simply... / The bottom line is...

Concluding with a call to action

A presentation does not end — it lands. The conclusion should signal clearly that you are finishing, restate the central message, and tell the audience exactly what you want them to do, decide, or feel next. A persuasive talk without a call to action is a story with no last page.

CONCLUDING & CALLING TO ACTION

Stage	Signposting language
Signal the end	So, let me bring this to a close. / To sum up, then... / I'm coming to the end of my presentation.
Restate the message	The main message I'd like to leave you with is... / If you take away just one idea today, it's this...
Call to action	So my ask is simple: let's approve the pilot by Friday. / What I'd like you to do now is...
Close & thank	Thank you very much for your attention. / Thank you — I'd be happy to take any questions.

Handling the question-and-answer session

Many speakers relax too early and treat questions as an afterthought. In fact, the Q&A is where persuasion is won or lost, because it is the part the audience trusts most: it is unscripted. Listen to the whole question before answering, and if it is long or hostile, rephrase it calmly before responding — this buys thinking time and keeps you in control.

INVITING & HANDLING QUESTIONS

Stage	Signposting language
Invite questions	I'd be glad to take your questions now. / Does anyone have any questions?
Acknowledge	That's a great question. / Thanks for raising that.

Stage	Signposting language
Check / rephrase	So, if I understand you correctly, you're asking... / Just to make sure I've got this right...
Answer & confirm	The short answer is... / Does that answer your question?
Redirect / park	That's slightly outside today's scope, but I'm happy to discuss it afterwards.

DEALING WITH A QUESTION YOU CAN'T ANSWER

Stage	Signposting language
Admit honestly	That's a good question, and I don't have the figure to hand. / I'm afraid I can't give you an accurate answer right now.
Promise follow-up	Let me check and get back to you by tomorrow. / Can I take that offline and send you the details?
Deflect to expert	My colleague Anna is closer to that data — Anna, would you like to take this one?

NEVER BLUFF

Inventing an answer is the fastest way to lose credibility. “I don't know, but I'll find out and send it to you by Friday” sounds far more professional than a confident guess that later proves wrong. Honesty plus a concrete follow-up is always the stronger move.

Rhetorical techniques that persuade

Structure makes a talk *clear*; rhetoric makes it *memorable*. A few classical devices, used sparingly, will lift an ordinary presentation into a persuasive one.

The rule of three

Ideas grouped in threes feel complete and satisfying to the ear: “It's faster, cheaper, and simpler.” “We listened, we learned, and we changed.” Three is enough to feel deliberate, but not so many that the pattern is lost.

Rhetorical questions

A question you answer yourself pulls listeners into your reasoning: “So what does this mean for us? It means we can no longer wait.” The brief pause after the question makes the audience think the answer before you give it.

Contrast

Setting two ideas against each other sharpens your point: “The old system cost us time; the new one gives it back.” Contrast is also a form of signposting — words like *but*, *however*, and *on the other hand* tell the audience a turn is coming.

You-focus

Persuasion is about the listener, not the speaker. Convert “our product has feature X” into “this means *you* save two hours a week.” The more your sentences answer the audience's silent “what's in it for me?”, the more persuasive you become.

TWO WAYS TO LOSE THE ROOM

Do not read your slides aloud. The audience can read faster than you can speak; reading word for word insults their attention and makes you sound robotic. Slides are a backdrop — you are the message. **Do not overload your slides.** A slide crammed with paragraphs and ten bullet points forces the audience to choose between reading and listening, and they will do neither well. Aim for a few words or one clear image per slide, and let your voice carry the detail.

REHEARSE, PACE, AND PAUSE

Rehearse aloud, on your feet, at least twice — silent reading hides the sentences that trip your tongue. **Slow down.** Nervous speakers rush; a deliberate pace sounds confident and gives non-native listeners time to follow. **Use the pause.** A two-second silence before a key point makes the room lean in, and a pause after it lets the idea land. Silence is not empty — it is emphasis. Combine this with the signpost-then-content habit and you will sound both calm and in command.

A model in action

Here is a short script showing a strong opening, a clean transition, and a calm response to a tough question. Notice how the signposting is spoken aloud, not just implied.

Opening: “Good morning, everyone, and thank you for coming. Here’s a question: how much do you think our team spends each year on tasks a machine could do in seconds? The answer is eleven thousand hours. My name is Daniel, I lead operations, and in the next fifteen minutes I want to convince you that we can win most of those hours back. I’ve divided my talk into three parts: first, where the time goes; then, the solution we tested; and finally, what I’m asking you to approve today.”

Transition: “So that’s the scale of the problem — eleven thousand hours lost to manual work. Now let’s turn to the solution, and what happened when we trialled it with the finance team last quarter.”

Tough question: “*Questioner:* But what’s the failure rate when the tool gets it wrong? *Daniel:* That’s a great question, and an important one. If I understand you correctly, you’re asking how often we’d need a human to step in. The honest answer is that I don’t have the exact figure to hand — it was under three per cent in the pilot, but let me confirm the precise number and send it to you by tomorrow. Does that work?”

Don’t: “Erm, so, this slide, as you can probably see, has a lot of data on it, basically about our quarterly numbers and various things, and yeah, I’ll just read through these bullet points one by one...”

Do: “Let’s look at this chart. The key takeaway is simple: revenue doubled in twelve months. *(pause)* Now, why did that happen? Three reasons.”

Exercise: order the parts of a talk

Part A. Below are seven stages of a presentation in the wrong order. Put them into a logical sequence from start to finish (1–7).

- Conclusion and call to action
- Opening hook
- Question-and-answer session
- Outlining the agenda
- The body, with signposted transitions
- Stating the topic and objective
- Welcoming and introducing yourself

Part B. Match each signposting phrase (1–6) to its stage (i–vi).

MATCH THE PHRASE TO THE STAGE

Phrase	Stage
1. “This brings me to my next point...”	i. Concluding & call to action
2. “As you can see from this chart...”	ii. Giving an example
3. “If you remember one thing today, it’s this...”	iii. Transition / moving on
4. “To illustrate this, take the case of...”	iv. Referring to a visual
5. “So my ask is simple: let’s approve the pilot.”	v. Emphasising a key point
6. “I’ve divided my talk into three parts.”	vi. Outlining the structure

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1 = (b) Opening hook; 2 = (g) Welcoming and introducing yourself; 3 = (f) Stating the topic and objective; 4 = (d) Outlining the agenda; 5 = (e) The body, with signposted transitions; 6 = (a) Conclusion and call to action; 7 = (c) Question-and-answer session.

Part B: 1–iii; 2–iv; 3–v; 4–ii; 5–i; 6–vi.

Master these patterns and your audience will always know where they are, where they are going, and what you want from them. Structure earns their attention; signposting keeps it; rhetoric and a confident delivery turn that attention into agreement. That is what it means to give a presentation that persuades.

The Language of Negotiation

Bargaining, proposing, conceding, and closing deals in diplomatic English

Negotiation is where relationships and results meet. Whether you are agreeing a price, settling contract terms, resolving a dispute, or dividing scarce resources between teams, the words you choose shape both the outcome and the relationship that survives it. This chapter gives you the diplomatic English that experienced negotiators rely on: language that is firm on substance yet soft on people, that protects your interests without burning bridges, and that lets you say a clear "no" while keeping the door open. You will build a working vocabulary, a bank of ready-made phrases for every stage of a deal, and the conditional structures that turn demands into trades. By the end, you should be able to open a meeting, table a proposal, push back politely, break a deadlock, and close confidently in English.

The vocabulary of the deal

Before you can negotiate fluently, you need the shared vocabulary that negotiators use across industries and borders. These terms appear constantly in meetings, emails, and contracts, and using them correctly signals that you are a serious, experienced counterpart.

CORE NEGOTIATION TERMS

Function	Phrases
leverage	The power or advantage that lets you influence the deal. "Our exclusive technology gives us real leverage here."
BATNA	Your Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement — what you will do if you walk away. A strong BATNA makes you harder to pressure.
concession	Something you give up to move the deal forward. "We're willing to make one final concession on delivery."
compromise	A middle position both sides accept. "Let's find a compromise that works for everyone."
counteroffer	A revised offer made in response to the other side's. "We've reviewed your terms and would like to make a counteroffer ."
deadlock / stalemate	A point where neither side will move and talks stall. "We seem to have reached a deadlock on price."
terms	The specific conditions of the deal — price, timing, scope, payment. "The commercial terms are acceptable; the legal ones need work."
deal-breaker	A condition that, if unmet, ends the negotiation. "An exclusivity clause would be a deal-breaker for us."
win-win	An outcome where both sides genuinely benefit. "I'm confident we can reach a win-win arrangement."
bottom line	The lowest (or most) you can accept; your limit. "I'm afraid that's below our bottom line ."
walk away	To leave without a deal. "If the price doesn't improve, we're prepared to walk away ."

NOTE

Native and fluent negotiators often understate. "That's a little outside our range" usually means "that is far too expensive," and "I'd have some difficulty with that" frequently means "no." Learn to hear the polite surface and the firm meaning underneath — and to use the same softening yourself.

Opening and setting the agenda

The opening minutes set the tone. A good opening is warm but businesslike: it builds rapport, agrees the structure, and clarifies what each side hopes to achieve. Investing thirty seconds in the agenda saves you from talking past each other for the next hour.

OPENING & SETTING THE AGENDA

Function	Phrases
Building rapport	Thank you for making the time today. / It's good to finally sit down together on this.
Stating the purpose	What we'd like to come away with today is... / Our aim for this session is to agree the broad shape of a deal.
Proposing structure	Perhaps we could start with scope, then move on to price and timing? / Shall we agree an agenda before we dive in?
Checking shared goals	Before we start, could I ask what success looks like for your side? / It would help to understand your priorities up front.
Setting ground rules	Why don't we treat everything today as provisional until we've agreed the whole package? / Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Stating positions and priorities

Once the agenda is set, each side states where it stands. The skill here is to be clear about your interests without locking yourself into a rigid position you cannot move from. Distinguish between *what you want* and *why you want it* — the "why" usually leaves room for creative trades.

STATING POSITIONS & PRIORITIES

Function	Phrases
Stating your position	Our position on this is fairly clear... / From where we stand, the key issue is...
Signalling priority	The single most important thing for us is... / Price is where we have the least flexibility.
Signalling flexibility	We have some room to move on timing. / We're more flexible on volume than on price.
Explaining the interest	The reason this matters to us is... / What's driving this for us is our own delivery commitments.
Inviting their view	How does that sit with you? / Where are you on this?

Making proposals

A proposal moves the conversation from talk to terms. The most useful proposal in business English is the *conditional offer*: you never simply give — you offer to give *if* the other side gives in return. This single habit protects you from being slowly chipped away.

MAKING PROPOSALS

Function	Phrases
Tabling an offer	Here's what we'd propose... / Let me put something on the table.
Conditional offer	We'd be prepared to lower the price if you could commit to a two-year contract. / We could move on delivery, provided you cover the freight.
Softening the offer	This is just a starting point, but... / Subject to the rest of the package, we'd suggest...
Floating an idea	What if we were to...? / Suppose we agreed to... — would that work for you?
Inviting a response	How would you feel about that? / Is that something you could work with?

Using conditionals to trade

Conditional language is the engine of negotiation. The structure "*If you..., then we...*" lets you link a concession from them to a concession from you, so nothing is given away for free. Note the verb forms: the first conditional ("If you agree, we will reduce") sounds firmer and more real; the second conditional ("If you were to agree, we would reduce") sounds more tentative and exploratory — useful when you want to test an idea without committing.

CONDITIONALS FOR TRADING

Function	Phrases
Firm trade (first conditional)	If you place the order this quarter, we'll hold the current price. / If you take care of installation, we can reduce the unit cost.

Function	Phrases
Tentative trade (second conditional)	If you were to increase the volume, we might be able to improve the discount. / If you could be flexible on payment, we'd consider a longer warranty.
Two-sided trade	We'd do X, but only if you'd do Y. / In return for a faster timeline, we'd ask for a deposit.
Linking issues	Let's not look at price in isolation — if we link it to volume, there's room to move. / These two points really go together.
Protecting the concession	That offer stands only if the rest of the package holds. / It's conditional on everything else being agreed.

TIP — NEVER GIVE A CONCESSION FOR NOTHING

Every time you give something up, ask for something in return — even something small. "Yes, we can do that, *if...*" should become a reflex. A concession given freely is rarely valued, and it trains the other side to keep pushing. Trading concessions, by contrast, signals that you have limits and makes each movement feel like progress for both sides.

Bargaining and making concessions

Bargaining is the back-and-forth of give and take. Good concession behaviour follows a pattern: concede slowly, in shrinking amounts, and always with a reason attached. Sudden large concessions suggest you had a lot of room and invite the other side to keep digging.

BARGAINING & MAKING CONCESSIONS

Function	Phrases
Opening the bargaining	Let's see if we can close the gap. / I think there's a deal to be done here — let's find it.
Making a concession	As a gesture of goodwill, we could... / We're willing to meet you halfway on this.
Limiting a concession	That's about as far as we can go. / We can move a little, but not much.
Final offer	This really is our best and final offer. / I've gone back to my team, and this is the most we can do.
Splitting the difference	Why don't we split the difference? / Could we meet in the middle at...?

Diplomatic toughness: saying no without damage

The hardest skill in negotiation is refusing firmly while keeping the relationship warm. The principle is simple: *be hard on the problem, soft on the person*. You reject the proposal, not the people. Three techniques do most of the work. First, **soften the frame**: instead of "No," start with "I'm afraid..." or "I can see why you'd ask, but...". Second, **give a reason**: a "no" with a reason feels fair; a bare "no" feels personal. Third, **reframe as a condition**: turn the refusal into a conditional that shows the path to "yes" — "We couldn't agree to that as it stands, but if you were able to...".

PUSHING BACK / REJECTING DIPLOMATICALLY

Function	Phrases
Soft refusal	I'm afraid that's going to be difficult for us. / I don't think we could make that work.
Refusal with reason	The challenge with that is our own cost base. / We'd love to, but our margins simply won't allow it.
Acknowledging then declining	I completely understand where you're coming from, but... / That's a fair point; the difficulty for us is...
Reframing as a condition	Not at that price — but if the volume were higher, we could revisit it. / We couldn't do that on its own, though as part of a wider deal, perhaps.
Holding firm	I'm sorry, but that's a point we really can't move on. / This is genuinely a deal-breaker for us.

WARN — AGGRESSIVE VS ASSERTIVE

Assertive language defends your interests; aggressive language attacks the other person. The line is thinner in a second language, where literal translations can land harder than you intend. Avoid "You're wrong," "That's ridiculous," "You have to...," "Take it or leave it," and "There's no point discussing it." These shut down dialogue and provoke defensiveness. Prefer "I see it differently," "I'm not sure that works for us," "We'd need you to...," and "Let's see what's possible." You can be every bit as firm — just aim the firmness at the issue, not the human across the table.

AVOID

✗ "That price is impossible. You're not being serious. We won't pay a cent over our budget, so don't bother coming back with anything higher."

BETTER

✓ "I'm afraid that's some way outside our range. Our budget here is genuinely fixed, so to make this work we'd need to look hard at the price. What flexibility do you have?"

Must-haves vs nice-to-haves

Before any serious negotiation, separate your *must-haves* (non-negotiable requirements) from your *nice-to-haves* (desirable but tradeable). Signalling this clearly helps both sides spend energy where it matters and trade generously where it doesn't.

MUST-HAVES VS NICE-TO-HAVES

Function	Phrases
Flagging a must-have	This is non-negotiable for us, I'm afraid. / On-time delivery is an absolute requirement.
Flagging a deal-breaker	Without that clause, there's no deal. / That one point would stop us going ahead.
Flagging a nice-to-have	This isn't critical, but it would be a real plus. / We could live without it, though we'd prefer to have it.
Offering to trade it away	We'd happily drop that if it helps us land the bigger issue. / That's one we can give you in exchange for...
Ranking the issues	If I had to prioritise, price comes first, then timing, then volume. / Let's deal with the must-haves before the rest.

Stalling, breaking deadlock, and checking understanding

Not every moment calls for a decision. Sometimes you need to buy time to consult colleagues or think; sometimes talks stall and you must find a way through. And throughout, you should keep confirming that both sides understand the same thing — misunderstanding is the silent killer of deals.

STALLING / BUYING TIME

Function	Phrases
Buying time	Let me take that away and come back to you. / I'd like to sleep on it, if that's all right.
Consulting others	I'll need to run this past my team. / That's above my authority — let me check.
Pausing	Could we take a short break? / Shall we park this point and come back to it?
Slowing down	I don't want to rush this. / Let's not commit to anything we haven't thought through.

BREAKING DEADLOCK

Function	Phrases
Naming the deadlock	We seem to be stuck on this one point. / I feel we've reached an impasse here.
Stepping back	Let's go back to what we're each trying to achieve. / Can we look at the underlying interests, not just the positions?
Introducing a new variable	What if we brought timing into the equation? / Is there a third option we haven't considered?
Setting it aside	Why don't we leave this and see if it solves itself once the rest is agreed? / Let's bank what we agree on and return to this.

CHECKING UNDERSTANDING

Function	Phrases
Clarifying	Just so I'm clear, are you saying...? / Can I check what you mean by...?
Summarising	So, if I understand correctly... / Let me play that back to you.
Confirming the trade	So you'd accept X in return for Y — is that right? / To be clear, this is conditional on...
Avoiding assumptions	I don't want to put words in your mouth, but... / Correct me if I've misread this.

Reaching, confirming, and closing

The close is where careful negotiators protect everything they have won. Summarise the whole package out loud, confirm it in writing, and clarify the next steps so the agreement does not unravel afterwards. "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" — so do not celebrate until the last open point is closed.

REACHING & CONFIRMING AGREEMENT

Function	Phrases
Sensing agreement	It feels like we're close. / I think we have the shape of a deal.
Confirming the package	So, to summarise what we've agreed... / Let me run through the final terms.
Locking it in	Are we agreed on all of that? / Can we shake on it?
Putting it in writing	I'll send a written summary by close of play. / Let's get this into a short term sheet.

CLOSING

Function	Phrases
Agreeing next steps	What are the next steps from here? / I'll draft the contract; you'll review by Friday.
Closing warmly	It's been a pleasure doing business with you. / I'm glad we found something that works for both sides.
Confirming goodwill	I think this is a deal we'll both be happy with. / Here's to a long partnership.
Leaving the door open (no deal)	It's a shame we couldn't get there this time, but let's stay in touch. / If circumstances change, do come back to us.

KEY

A good negotiator is firm on substance and soft on people, trades rather than gives, speaks in conditionals, separates must-haves from nice-to-haves, and confirms everything in writing. Aim for a genuine win-win: the best deals are the ones both sides are still glad they made a year later.

Negotiation in action: a price and terms dialogue

The following dialogue shows a supplier (Lena) and a buyer (Marco) moving through proposal, counteroffer, concession, and agreement. Notice the conditional language, the trading of concessions, and the diplomatic refusals.

Marco: Thanks for coming in, Lena. We're keen to work with you, but I'll be honest — your quote of forty euros a unit is some way above our budget.

Lena: I appreciate the directness. Can I ask what kind of volume you're looking at? That really drives our pricing.

Marco: Around eight thousand units this year, possibly more next year if it goes well.

Lena: Understood. Here's what I'd propose: if you could commit to the full eight thousand up front, rather than ordering in batches, we'd be prepared to bring the price down to thirty-six.

Marco: Thirty-six is closer, but still above where we need to be. Our bottom line is really around thirty-three. Could you get there?

Lena: I'm afraid thirty-three is below our margin on a single year's order. The challenge for us is the set-up cost. But... if you were willing to sign a two-year agreement, that would change the picture.

Marco: A two-year commitment is a big ask. What would it get us?

Lena: Over two years we could spread the set-up, so I could offer thirty-four. And as a gesture of goodwill, we'd include free delivery for the first year.

Marco: Let me make sure I've got this. Two-year deal, thirty-four a unit, free delivery in year one — is that right?

Lena: That's it. Though to be clear, the thirty-four only stands if the volume holds at eight thousand a year.

Marco: The volume's fine. I could live with thirty-four — but if I'm committing for two years, I'd want delivery covered in both years, not just the first.

Lena: Let me think... I can't do free delivery for two full years; that would wipe out the saving for me. But I could meet you halfway — free in year one, and a fifty per cent discount on freight in year two. Could you work with that?

Marco: That feels fair. So: thirty-four a unit, two-year term, free freight in year one, half-price freight in year two, eight thousand units a year. We have a deal.

Lena: We do. I'm glad we found something that works for both sides. I'll send a written summary and a draft term sheet by the end of today, and we can get the contract moving from there.

Marco: Perfect. It's been a pleasure — here's to a good partnership.

NOTE

Watch how neither side gives anything away for free. Lena drops the price only in exchange for volume and a longer term; when Marco asks for two years of free delivery, she refuses diplomatically ("I can't do that... but I could meet you halfway") and trades a smaller concession instead. Marco confirms the package twice before agreeing. That discipline is what protects a deal.

Putting it together

Diplomatic negotiation English is not about clever tricks; it is about a small set of habits applied consistently. Open by agreeing the agenda and surfacing priorities. State your interests, not just rigid positions. Propose in conditionals so that every offer is a trade. Push back by being hard on the problem and soft on the person. Know your must-haves, your bottom line, and your BATNA before you walk in. Check understanding constantly, and confirm the final package in writing. Do these well, and you will close more deals — and keep more relationships — in English.

PRACTICE

Each statement below is blunt or aggressive. Rewrite each one as diplomatic, assertive negotiation language. Aim to soften the frame, add a reason or a condition, and keep your firmness aimed at the issue rather than the person.

1. "No. We won't pay that."
2. "Your delivery time is far too slow."
3. "That's our final offer. Take it or leave it."
4. "You have to give us a bigger discount."
5. "We need an answer right now."
6. "That clause is completely unacceptable."

ANSWER KEY

Many versions are possible. These are model answers.

1. "I'm afraid that's outside our budget as it stands. To make this work, we'd need to look again at the price — what flexibility do you have?"
2. "Delivery timing is a real concern for us, given our own commitments. Is there any way we could bring the lead time forward?"
3. "This really is the most we can do at this point. If something changes on the volume, we'd be glad to revisit it."
4. "For us to move ahead, we'd need a more competitive discount. If we increased the order, could you improve the price?"
5. "I understand there's some urgency. Could we agree the key points today and confirm the details by tomorrow morning?"
6. "I'm afraid that clause would be a deal-breaker for us as written. Could we look at rewording it so it works for both sides?"

Telephone & Virtual Communication

Phone calls, video meetings, and the spoken English of remote work

On the phone and in video calls, you lose most of what makes face-to-face conversation easy: facial expressions, gestures, the chance to point at something on the table. What remains is your voice, your words, and a handful of fixed phrases that signal what you are doing at each moment of the conversation. This chapter gives you those phrases. Master a few dozen of them and you will sound calm and professional even when the line is bad, the speaker is fast, or three people start talking at once. We will work through traditional telephone calls first, then move to the particular challenges of video meetings, and finish with a reliable reference for spelling names and reading numbers aloud.

Telephone calls: the building blocks

A business call has a predictable shape: you greet and identify yourselves, you reach the right person, you exchange information (often a message), you confirm what was agreed, and you close. Each stage has its own set-phrases. Because the listener cannot see you, these phrases do extra work: they tell the other person *where you are in the call* and *whose turn it is to speak*. Learn them as whole chunks rather than building each sentence word by word.

Answering and identifying yourself

OPENING THE CALL

Situation	Phrases
Answering (company)	Good morning, <i>Meridian Logistics</i> , Anna speaking. — Thank you for calling Meridian, how can I help you?
Answering (direct line)	Hello, this is <i>Daniel Cho</i> . — Daniel Cho speaking.
Saying who you are	Hi, this is <i>Priya Nair</i> from the finance team. — It's Priya here, from Accounts.
Stating your purpose	I'm calling about <i>the May invoice</i> . — The reason I'm calling is to confirm Friday's delivery.
Returning a call	I'm returning <i>Mr Okafor's</i> call. — You left me a message earlier — I'm calling you back.

THIS IS VS I AM

On the phone, English speakers say *This is Priya* or *It's Priya* to introduce themselves — not "I am Priya". To ask who is calling, say *Who's calling, please?* or *Could I ask who's speaking?* — never "Who are you?"

Asking for someone

REACHING THE RIGHT PERSON

Situation	Phrases
Asking to be connected	Could I speak to <i>Ms Lindqvist</i> , please? — I'd like to speak to someone in IT support.
Saying who you want, softly	Is <i>Tom</i> available, by any chance? — Would it be possible to speak to the duty manager?
When they answer	Speaking. — This is she / This is he. — Yes, that's me.
Person unavailable	I'm afraid she's <i>in a meeting</i> right now. — He's away from his desk at the moment. — She's out of the office until Monday.
Offering an alternative	Can I take a message? — Would you like to hold, or shall I ask her to call you back?

Taking and leaving messages

MESSAGES

Situation	Phrases
Offering to take one	Can I take a message? — Would you like to leave a message?
Leaving one	Could you ask her to call me back? — Could you let him know that <i>the samples have arrived?</i> — Please tell her I'll email the details.

Situation	Phrases
Giving call-back details	She can reach me on <i>double-oh-four-four</i> ... — The best time to get me is after two.
Reading the message back	So that's <i>Mr Ferreira</i> , and he'll call back at three — is that right? — Let me just read that back to you.
Confirming you'll pass it on	I'll make sure she gets the message. — I'll pass that on as soon as he's free.

ALWAYS READ THE MESSAGE BACK

Before you end the call, repeat the name, number, and the key point. A thirty-second read-back prevents a wrong number or a misheard name from turning into a missed deal. Phrase it as a question: *Let me confirm — that's ..., on ..., calling about Have I got that right?*

Putting on hold and transferring

HOLD AND TRANSFER

Situation	Phrases
Asking to hold	Could you hold the line for a moment, please? — Do you mind holding while I check?
Coming back	Thanks for holding. — Sorry to keep you waiting.
Transferring	I'll put you through to <i>the accounts team</i> . — Let me transfer you to my colleague. — Bear with me while I connect you.
Warning of a possible problem	If we get cut off, the number here is... — In case we're disconnected, let me give you a direct line.
Wrong department	I'm afraid you've come through to the wrong department — let me redirect you.

Poor connection and asking to repeat

WHEN YOU CAN'T HEAR

Situation	Phrases
Signalling a bad line	Sorry, the line's a bit poor. — I think we have a bad connection. — You're breaking up a little.
Asking to repeat	Sorry, could you say that again? — Would you mind repeating the last part? — I didn't quite catch that.
Asking to slow down	Could you slow down just a little, please? — Sorry, you're going a bit fast for me.
Asking to speak up	Could you speak up a little? — You're very faint at this end.
Suggesting a fix	Shall I call you back? — Why don't we try again in a minute? — Let me ring you on the landline.

"I DIDN'T CATCH THAT"

This is the most useful phrase on the phone. It is polite, it blames nobody, and it works for a bad line, a fast speaker, or an unfamiliar word. Pair it with the exact word you missed: *Sorry, I caught the name but not the company — could you repeat that?* Naming what you missed saves the other person from repeating everything.

Checking, confirming, and ending

CONFIRMING AND CLOSING

Situation	Phrases
Checking understanding	So, just to confirm... — Let me make sure I've understood. — If I've got this right, you'd like...
Confirming a detail	That's <i>the fourteenth</i> , not the fortieth? — Was that <i>fifteen</i> or fifty?
Agreeing next steps	I'll send that over by end of day. — So you'll email the quote and I'll reply by Thursday.
Signalling the end	I think that's everything. — Was there anything else? — Right, I'd better let you go.
Closing politely	Thanks very much for your help. — It was good to speak to you. — Speak soon. — Have a good day.

PRONUNCIATION STRATEGIES FOR THE PHONE

With no body language to fall back on, your delivery has to carry the meaning. Four habits make you instantly clearer:

- **Slow down at the edges.** Speak names, numbers, dates, and email addresses noticeably slower than the rest of the sentence. The middle of a sentence can run at normal speed; the details cannot.
- **Chunk your information.** Break long strings into small groups with a tiny pause between them: a number as *020 // 7946 // 0018*, a sort code as pairs. Pauses give the listener time to write.
- **Confirm numbers and dates twice.** Say it, then frame it: "*the thirtieth — three-zero*", "*fifty, five-zero, not fifteen*". The pairs fifteen/fifty and thirteen/thirty are the classic traps.
- **Reformulate instead of repeating.** If "Can you make Tuesday?" is misheard, don't just say it louder — rephrase: "*Are you free on Tuesday, the twenty-first?*" A different wording often gets through where a louder one does not.

Unclear vs clear
and difficult line
Unclear: "Yeah so I'll ping you the docs by EOD and we'll touch base re: the fifteen units, my cell's oh-seven-five-double-something, catch you later." (*Mumbled, jargon-heavy, the number trails off, "fifteen" unconfirmed.*)
Clear: "I'll email the documents to you today. Let me confirm the order: that's *fifty units — five-zero*. My mobile number is *oh-seven-five-five // double-two // four-one*. I'll read that back: zero-seven-five-five, double-two, four-one. Thanks very much — speak soon."

Dialogue 1 — Taking a message

Receptionist: Good afternoon, Hartley & Voss, Marco speaking. How can I help?

Caller: Hello, this is Lena Brandt from Aurora Design. Could I speak to Sofia Reyes, please?

Receptionist: I'm afraid Sofia's in a meeting until four. Can I take a message?

Caller: Yes, please. Could you ask her to call me back about the brochure proofs? We've spotted an error on page two.

Receptionist: Of course. May I take your name again and a number?

Caller: It's Lena Brandt — that's B-R-A-N-D-T — and the number is oh-two-oh, seven-nine-four-six, double-three, oh-one.

Receptionist: Let me read that back: Lena Brandt, B-R-A-N-D-T, on zero-two-zero, seven-nine-four-six, double-three, zero-one — calling about an error on page two of the brochure proofs. Have I got that right?

Caller: That's perfect, thank you.

Receptionist: I'll make sure she gets it as soon as she's free. Thanks for calling.

COMMON MISTAKES THAT COST YOU THE CALL

- **Mumbling the important bits.** People often speak clearly until the name or number — and then rush. Do the opposite: slow down exactly there.
- **Jargon and abbreviations over a bad line.** "EOD", "ASAP", "ping me", "circle back" are guesswork for a listener who can't hear well or is non-native. Use plain words: "by the end of today", "as soon as possible".
- **Not confirming.** Ending without a read-back means a misheard "fifty/fifteen" or "Tuesday/Thursday" goes unnoticed until it's a problem. Always confirm names, numbers, dates, and next steps.
- **Silence with no signposting.** If you go quiet to check something, say so — "*Bear with me a moment*" — or the other person thinks the line has dropped.

Video-meeting English

Video calls add a camera and screen-sharing, but they also add new failure points: muted microphones, frozen video, audio that lags or cuts out, and the awkward problem of two people starting to speak at the same moment. The language below keeps these meetings moving.

Joining and checking sound

GETTING STARTED

Situation	Phrases
Arriving	Hi everyone, can you hear me? — Morning all — am I coming through OK?
Checking video	Can you see my camera? — Let me just turn my video on.

Situation	Phrases
Confirming you can hear	Yes, loud and clear. — We can hear you fine. — You're coming through well.
Waiting for others	Shall we give it a minute for the others to join? — Let's wait for Yuki before we start.
Setting up	I'll be recording today, if that's all right. — Feel free to keep your camera off if your connection's slow.

Tech issues

WHEN SOMETHING BREAKS

Situation	Phrases
Someone is muted	You're on mute. — I think your mic's off — we can't hear you. — We lost your audio for a second.
Audio dropping	You're cutting out. — You're a bit choppy — could you say that again? — Your audio's lagging.
Video frozen	I think your screen's frozen. — Your video's stuck — the audio's fine, though.
Echo / feedback	There's a bit of an echo — could you mute when you're not speaking? — Someone has an open mic.
Sharing your screen	I'll share my screen now. — Can everyone see my slides? — Let me know when the screen comes up.
Stop sharing	I'll stop sharing. — Are you back to seeing faces?
Fixing it	Let me try leaving and rejoining. — Bear with me, I'll switch to my phone. — Why don't you dial in by audio?

Turn-taking, overlap, and silence

The single biggest difference between an in-person and an online meeting is timing. A small audio delay means two people often start at once, and a thoughtful pause can feel like a dropped connection. The phrases below manage both.

MANAGING THE FLOW ONLINE

Situation	Phrases
Taking the floor	Could I just come in here? — Can I add something to that? — If I may...
Handing over	Go ahead, Yuki — sorry, you go first. — What are your thoughts, Sam?
When two people overlap	Sorry, after you. — Oh, please — go ahead. — No, you carry on.
Inviting a quiet person	Priya, we haven't heard from you — any thoughts? — Did you want to add anything, Tom?
Breaking a silence	I'll take the silence as agreement, then. — Are we all happy with that? — Feel free to jump in.
Using chat / hand-raise	Drop it in the chat if it's easier. — I see a hand up — go ahead, Marco.

Recapping for late joiners

BRINGING PEOPLE UP TO SPEED

Situation	Phrases
Welcoming a latecomer	Hi Sam, glad you made it. — Let me quickly bring you up to speed.
Summarising so far	To recap for anyone who's just joined... — Where we've got to is... — In short, we've agreed on the budget but not the timeline.
Pointing to what's next	We're just about to move on to the timeline. — You haven't missed the decision part.
Closing the loop	I'll send round notes afterwards, so don't worry if you missed anything. — The recording will go out today.

Dialogue 2 — A video call with a hiccup

Chair: Right, shall we make a start? Carla, could you walk us through the figures?

Carla: Sure. So if you look at the first quarter —

Chair: Sorry, Carla — you're on mute. We've lost your audio.

Carla: Oops. Can you hear me now?

Chair: Loud and clear, thanks. Go ahead.

Carla: Great. I'll share my screen so you can follow the numbers. Can everyone see the dashboard?

Group: Yes, that's come up fine.

Carla: So revenue is up nine percent on the quarter — that's nine, not nineteen — and —
(Devin joins late.)

Chair: Hi Devin, glad you made it. Let me quickly bring you up to speed: Carla's taking us through Q1, and we've just seen that revenue's up nine percent. You haven't missed any decisions — we're still on the figures.

Devin: Perfect, thanks. Sorry — you're cutting out a little, Carla. Could you repeat the last number?

Carla: Of course. Revenue up nine percent — nine, that's the figure. I'll drop the full table in the chat as well.

Chair: Brilliant. And I'll send round the recording afterwards so nobody has to scribble.

Spelling names and reading numbers aloud

Names and numbers are where calls go wrong, so it pays to do them deliberately. To spell a name clearly, use the NATO phonetic alphabet — the international standard used by aviation, the military, and call centres worldwide. You don't have to be word-perfect, but knowing it for the trickier letters (the ones that sound alike, like B/P/D/T/V) makes you far easier to understand.

THE NATO PHONETIC ALPHABET

Situation	Phrases
A-F	A — Alpha · B — Bravo · C — Charlie · D — Delta · E — Echo · F — Foxtrot
G-L	G — Golf · H — Hotel · I — India · J — Juliett · K — Kilo · L — Lima
M-R	M — Mike · N — November · O — Oscar · P — Papa · Q — Quebec · R — Romeo
S-X	S — Sierra · T — Tango · U — Uniform · V — Victor · W — Whiskey · X — X-ray
Y-Z	Y — Yankee · Z — Zulu
In use	That's Brandt — B for Bravo, R for Romeo, A for Alpha, N for November, D for Delta, T for Tango.

READING FIGURES ALOUD

Situation	Phrases
Phone numbers	Read in chunks, digit by digit. 0044 = "double-oh-four-four"; 020 7946 0018 = "oh-two-oh // seven-nine-four-six // double-oh-one-eight". "Oh" and "zero" are both fine; "double" saves repeats.
Whole numbers	1,500 = "one thousand five hundred" or "fifteen hundred". 2,025,000 = "two million, twenty-five thousand". Confirm the traps: "fifteen, one-five" vs "fifty, five-zero".
Decimals	3.14 = "three point one four" (read each digit after the point, not "fourteen"). 0.5 = "zero point five" or "nought point five".
Money	£1,250.50 = "one thousand two hundred and fifty pounds fifty". \$2.5m = "two point five million dollars". €99.99 = "ninety-nine euros ninety-nine".
Percentages & fractions	9% = "nine percent". $\frac{3}{4}$ = "three quarters". $1\frac{1}{2}$ = "one and a half".
Dates	14/06 (UK) = "the fourteenth of June". 06/14 (US) = "June fourteenth". Confirm: "the fourteenth — one-four — not the fortieth".
Times	15:30 = "half past three" / "three thirty (pm)". 09:05 = "five past nine" / "nine oh five".
Email & URLs	"@" = "at"; "." = "dot"; "_" = "underscore"; "-" = "dash" or "hyphen"; "/" = "slash". l.brandt@aurora-design.com = "L — for Lima — dot Brandt, B-R-A-N-D-T, at aurora — dash — design dot com". Spell anything unusual; say "all one word" or "all lower case" when helpful.

"DOUBLE", "OH", AND "ZERO"

For repeated digits, "double" is faster and clearer than saying the digit twice: 7700 = "seven-seven-double-oh" or "double-seven-double-oh". For 0, both "oh" and "zero" are understood; "zero" is slightly clearer on a bad line. Pick one and be consistent within a single number.

Exercise

Part A — Put the call in order. The lines of a short message-taking call have been jumbled. Number them 1–8 in the correct sequence.

- (a) "Of course. Could I take your name and number?"
- (b) "Good morning, Crestline Travel, Omar speaking."
- (c) "Let me read that back: David Akhtar, on oh-seven-nine-double-one, three-four-two-oh — about the Lisbon booking. Is that right?"
- (d) "I'm afraid she's with a client right now. Can I take a message?"
- (e) "Hello, this is David Akhtar. Could I speak to Mariam, please?"
- (f) "That's correct, thank you."
- (g) "Yes, please — could you ask her to call me back about the Lisbon booking?"
- (h) "It's David Akhtar — A-K-H-T-A-R — on oh-seven-nine-double-one, three-four-two-oh."

Part B — Fix the unclear phrase. Rewrite each line so it would be clear and professional on a bad line.

1. "Who are you?" (you want to know who is calling)
2. "I'll ping you the docs EOD, 'kay?"
3. "My number's 0779 113 420." (say it aloud, in chunks, with a read-back)
4. "Yeah it's fifteen units." (the listener might mishear)
5. (Your screen has frozen on a video call.) "... (say something)

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1 (b) — 2 (e) — 3 (d) — 4 (g) — 5 (a) — 6 (h) — 7 (c) — 8 (f).

Part B (sample answers):

1. "Could I ask who's calling, please?"
2. "I'll email the documents to you by the end of today, if that's all right."
3. "My number is oh-seven-seven-nine // double-one-three // four-two-oh. Let me read that back: zero-seven-seven-nine, one-one-three, four-two-zero."
4. "That's fifteen units — one-five, fifteen, not fifty."
5. "Sorry everyone — I think my screen's frozen. Bear with me, I'll leave and rejoin."

The thread running through this whole chapter is compensation: because your listener cannot see you, you compensate with structure (set-phrases that signal each stage), with pace (slowing down on the details), and with confirmation (reading numbers and names back). Do those three things and you will handle a noisy phone line or a glitchy video call with the same composure you bring to a face-to-face conversation — which, in a world of remote work, is one of the most valuable spoken skills you can own.

Networking & Small Talk

Building rapport, making connections, and the art of professional conversation

Few business skills pay off as reliably as the ability to walk into a room of strangers and walk out with a handful of genuine connections. Networking is not about collecting business cards or delivering a rehearsed sales pitch; it is about creating warmth, finding common ground, and giving people a reason to remember you. This chapter equips you with the language and the social instincts to start conversations, keep them flowing, present yourself clearly, and exit gracefully — whether you are at a conference, a trade fair, a company mixer, or a coffee break between sessions.

Why Small Talk Matters

To many professionals, especially those raised in cultures that value getting straight to business, small talk can feel trivial or even insincere. In fact, it serves a serious purpose. Small talk is the social handshake that comes before real collaboration. It signals goodwill, lowers defences, and lets two people calibrate each other before any meaningful exchange takes place. A short conversation about the weather, the venue, or a delayed flight is rarely about those topics at all — it is a low-risk way of saying, *“I am friendly, I am safe, and I am open to talking.”*

The good news is that small talk is a learnable skill, not an inborn talent. It runs on a fairly predictable set of phrases and moves, and once you have them ready, you can devote your attention to the person in front of you rather than scrambling for something to say.

NOTE

Throughout this chapter, treat the phrase banks as a menu, not a script. Pick two or three expressions from each table that feel natural in your own voice, and practise them until they come out smoothly. Sounding rehearsed is worse than sounding simple.

Introducing Yourself and Others

A good introduction is short, clear, and warm. State your name, offer a brief anchor (your role, your company, or your reason for being there), and — crucially — turn the attention outward with a question. When you introduce two other people, give each a small detail that gives them something to talk about.

INTRODUCING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Function	Phrases
Introducing yourself	Hi, I’m Mara — I don’t think we’ve met. · Hello, I’m Tomás, I work with the marketing team at Avantel. · May I introduce myself? My name’s Lena Okafor.
Responding to an introduction	Nice to meet you, Mara. · Pleasure to meet you. · I’ve heard a lot about you. · Likewise — how do you find the event so far?
Introducing two others	Anya, have you met Daniel? He’s in logistics, like you. · Let me introduce you to Sofia — she just gave the talk on supply chains. · I’d like you to meet a colleague of mine.
Reconnecting	We met last year in Berlin, didn’t we? · I think we spoke at the spring summit. · Forgive me — could you remind me of your name?

TIP: REMEMBERING NAMES

Repeat the name immediately after you hear it (*“Nice to meet you, Priya”*), use it once more within the first minute, and link it to a visual detail or a person you already know with that name. If you forget, ask — *“I’m so sorry, your name has slipped my mind”* is far better than avoiding the person for the rest of the evening.

Starting a Conversation

The hardest moment in networking is the first sentence. The secret is that almost any opener works, because the other person is usually just as relieved as you are that someone has broken the ice. Comment on the shared situation — the

venue, the talk, the queue for coffee — and you instantly have something in common.

OPENERS AT EVENTS

Function	Phrases
Commenting on the event	Is this your first time at the conference? · What did you make of the keynote? · Quite a turnout this year, isn't it?
Commenting on the situation	The coffee queue is quite something, isn't it? · Are you finding the sessions useful? · Mind if I join you?
Asking about the person	So what brings you here? · Which company are you with? · Have you come far?
Offering a small kindness	Can I get you a coffee while I'm up? · Here, let me grab that chair for you. · You look like you could use a refill.

Safe Topics — and Topics to Avoid

Some subjects build bridges; others build walls. Safe topics are positive, neutral, and shared — things you can both comment on without risk of offence or strong disagreement. Avoid anything that forces someone to defend a personal position or reveal private information they may prefer to keep private.

SAFE SMALL-TALK TOPICS

Function	Phrases
The weather	Gorgeous day for it, isn't it? · I hear it's meant to clear up by the weekend.
Travel & the journey	How was your trip in? · Did you fly or take the train? · Is this your first time in the city?
The event itself	Which sessions are you hoping to catch? · The venue's impressive, isn't it?
Industry & work	How's business treating your sector this year? · Are you seeing the same shift towards remote work?
Sport, food & culture	Did you catch the match last night? · Have you found anywhere good to eat nearby? · Any recommendations for the city?

WARN: TOPICS TO HANDLE WITH CARE

Unless you know someone well, steer clear of **politics, religion**, personal **finances or salary, health** and **age, relationship status**, and anything that invites gossip or complaint. A useful test: if a topic could make a stranger defensive or uncomfortable, save it for later or skip it entirely.

Keeping the Conversation Going

Once a conversation has started, your job is to keep the ball in the air. The single most powerful move is the **follow-up question**: take whatever the other person just said and ask them to expand on it. Combine this with small signals of interest — nodding, brief verbal acknowledgements, and echoing a key word — and people will feel genuinely heard.

KEEPING A CONVERSATION GOING

Function	Phrases
Follow-up questions	Oh really — how did that come about? · What made you decide to go into that? · And how's that been working out?
Showing interest	That sounds fascinating. · I hadn't thought of it that way. · Tell me more about that.
Active listening signals	Right. · Mm-hmm. · I see what you mean. · That makes sense.
Echoing & reflecting	So you're saying the market shifted overnight? · A complete rebuild — that must have been a huge undertaking.
Bringing yourself in	Funnily enough, we faced something similar. · That reminds me of a project we ran last year.

TIP: OPEN VS CLOSED QUESTIONS

A **closed question** can be answered with a single word — “*Do you enjoy your job?*” invites only *yes* or *no*. An **open question** begins with *what, how, why, where* or *tell me about* and invites a fuller answer — “*What do you enjoy most about your job?*” Use closed questions to confirm a fact; use open questions to actually start talking.

CLOSED VS OPEN QUESTIONS **Closed:** “Did you come a long way?” → “Yes.” (*conversation stalls*) **Open:** “What was the journey like getting here?” → “Oh, quite an adventure — my flight was delayed, so...” (*conversation flows*)

WARN: CONVERSATION KILLERS

Three habits end conversations fast. First, the **one-word answer**: when someone asks you a question, give them a thread to pull on, not a dead end. Second, **dominating**: if you have spoken for two minutes without a question, stop and hand the floor back. Third, **controversial or negative topics**: complaining about the food, the organisers, or a third party makes you look difficult, even when you are right.

Your Elevator Pitch

Sooner or later someone will ask, “*So, what do you do?*” Your answer — your **elevator pitch** — should take no longer than the time it takes a lift to travel a few floors: roughly fifteen to thirty seconds. A strong pitch names *who you help* and *what problem you solve*, not just your job title. Compare “*I’m a financial consultant*” with “*I help small manufacturers free up cash that’s trapped in their supply chains.*” The second invites a follow-up; the first ends the topic.

DESCRIBING YOUR JOB AND COMPANY CONCISELY

Function	Phrases
Naming what you do	I work in... · I’m responsible for... · My background is in...
Framing the value	Basically, we help companies that... · What we do is take the headache out of... · I help people who struggle with...
Describing the company	We’re a mid-sized firm specialising in... · We’re a start-up in the... space. · We’ve been in the market for about ten years.
Inviting a follow-up	...but I’d love to hear what you do. · It’s a bit niche — happy to explain if it’s useful. · How about you — what’s your line of work?

KEY: THE PITCH FORMULA

A reliable structure is: “**I help [who] to [achieve what], by [how].**” For example: “*I help hospitals to cut waiting times, by redesigning how patients move through the building.*” Keep it jargon-free — if your grandparent would not understand it, simplify it.

Building Rapport

Rapport is the sense of ease and mutual liking that turns a polite exchange into a real connection. It is built less through what you say than through how attentively you listen and how genuinely you respond. The four pillars below cost nothing and work everywhere.

Active listening

Give the speaker your eyes, not your phone. Use short signals — “*right,*” “*I see,*” “*go on*” — and let small silences sit rather than rushing to fill them. People can feel the difference between being listened to and merely being waited out.

Echoing

Reflecting a person’s own words back to them confirms that you are following and gently invites them to say more. If they mention “*a tricky merger,*” you might say, “*A tricky merger — in what way?*” Used sparingly, echoing is one of the most natural ways to deepen a conversation.

Finding common ground

Listen for overlaps — a shared city, a mutual contact, the same software headaches, a love of the same sport — and name them. *“Oh, you’re in Lisbon too?”* instantly shrinks the distance between two strangers.

Compliments that work

The best compliments are specific and about a choice, not an accident of birth. *“That was a sharp question you asked in the session”* lands far better than a vague or personal remark. Praise the talk, the idea, the work — and then ask about it.

PHRASES FOR BUILDING RAPPORT

Function	Phrases
Finding common ground	Oh, we have that in common. · Funny, we’re in the same boat. · You know Sven too? It’s a small world.
Specific compliments	I really admired how you handled that question. · Your point about pricing stuck with me. · That’s a clever way to look at it.
Warm acknowledgements	That’s a great point. · I can imagine. · Good for you — that’s no small thing.

KEY: CULTURAL AWARENESS

Small-talk norms vary widely. In some cultures (much of the UK, the US, Latin America) a few minutes of warm chat precedes any business; in others (parts of Northern Europe and East Asia) people move to the point more quickly and value brevity over banter. **Personal disclosure** differs too — asking about family is friendly in some places and intrusive in others. **Greetings** range from a firm handshake to a bow, a light cheek-kiss, or a simple nod; when unsure, follow the other person’s lead, keep physical contact light, and never grip too hard or too long. The safe default everywhere is warmth, attentiveness, and a willingness to mirror.

Exchanging Contact Details

When a conversation has gone well, make it easy to continue. Offer your card or a connection naturally, and always say *why* you would like to stay in touch — a reason makes the exchange feel purposeful rather than transactional.

EXCHANGING CONTACT DETAILS & BUSINESS CARDS

Function	Phrases
Offering your details	Here’s my card — do feel free to reach out. · Shall we swap details? · Let me give you my email.
Asking for theirs	Could I get your card? · Are you on LinkedIn? · What’s the best way to reach you?
Giving a reason	I’d love to send you that article we mentioned. · It’d be great to compare notes sometime. · Let’s find a time to talk properly.
Connecting digitally	I’ll send you a LinkedIn request tonight. · Shall I scan your QR code? · I’ll add a note so you remember where we met.

Moving On Gracefully

At a networking event, lingering too long with one person defeats the purpose for both of you. A polite exit is a kindness, not a rejection — the key is to close warmly, reference a next step, and give a light reason for moving on.

EXITING A CONVERSATION POLITELY

Function	Phrases
Signalling the close	Well, I won’t keep you... · It’s been really good talking to you. · I should probably let you mingle.
Giving a soft reason	I promised I’d catch a colleague before the next session. · I want to grab a word with the speaker. · Let me top up my coffee.
Leaving the door open	Let’s definitely stay in touch. · I’ll drop you that email this week. · Hopefully we’ll catch each other later.
Introducing an exit	Have you met Karim? You two should really talk. · Let me hand you over to my colleague.

Following Up Afterwards

Most networking value is created *after* the event, in the follow-up. Send a short message within a day or two while the meeting is still fresh, remind the person where you met, reference something specific you discussed, and suggest a small next step. On LinkedIn, never send a blank connection request — always add a line.

FOLLOWING UP AFTER MEETING SOMEONE

Function	Phrases
Opening the message	It was a pleasure meeting you at the summit. · Great to connect over coffee yesterday. · Lovely to chat at the Avantel stand.
Jogging the memory	We talked about your move into renewables. · You mentioned the report on hybrid teams — here it is.
Suggesting a next step	Would you be open to a short call next week? · Do let me know if a coffee would be useful. · I'll keep you posted on the project.
LinkedIn requests	Hi Nadia — great to meet you at the conference today. I'd love to stay connected. · Enjoyed our chat about supply chains — connecting here as promised.

Putting It All Together: A Conference Conversation

The dialogue below shows the full arc — an opener, safe small talk, an elevator pitch, exchanging details, and a graceful exit — between two strangers at a coffee break.

Elena: Quite a scrum at the coffee machine, isn't it? I don't think we've met — I'm Elena.

Raj: Nice to meet you, Elena. I'm Raj. And yes — I've nearly given up twice. Is this your first time at the conference?

Elena: Second, actually. I came last year in Vienna. How about you — have you come far?

Raj: All the way from Mumbai, so I'm running on coffee and optimism. The flight was delayed six hours.

Elena: Six hours — that's rough. And you still made the morning keynote?

Raj: Just about. I thought it was sharp, especially the part on automation. So what do you do, Elena?

Elena: I help mid-sized retailers cut the waste out of their packaging — basically, less material, lower cost, smaller footprint. And you?

Raj: Oh, that's right up my street. I work in logistics software — we help companies see exactly where their shipments are in real time. Packaging waste is a big topic for our clients.

Elena: Then we should definitely compare notes. We keep running into the same problem from different angles.

Raj: Couldn't agree more. Shall we swap details? I'd love to send you a case study we did on this exact thing.

Elena: Please do. Here's my card — and I'm on LinkedIn if that's easier.

Raj: Perfect. I'll send you a request tonight with a note so you remember where we met.

Elena: Lovely. Well, I won't keep you — I promised I'd catch the speaker before the next session. But it's been really good talking to you, Raj.

Raj: Likewise, Elena. Enjoy the rest of the day, and let's stay in touch.

NOTE

Notice how Elena and Raj each end most turns with a question or a thread, never a flat full stop. That single habit — always leave the other person something to grab — carries an entire conversation.

Exercise: From Closed to Open

Each question below is closed — it invites a one-word answer and tends to stall a conversation. Rewrite each as an open question that encourages the other person to say more. Suggested answers follow; many good versions are possible.

1. Did you enjoy the keynote?
2. Is this your first conference?
3. Do you like your job?
4. Was your journey okay?
5. Are you busy at work right now?
6. Do you know many people here?

ANSWER KEY

1. **Did you enjoy the keynote?** → What did you think of the keynote? / Which part of the keynote stood out for you?
2. **Is this your first conference?** → How many times have you been to this conference? / What brought you here this year?
3. **Do you like your job?** → What do you enjoy most about your work? / How did you get into your line of work?
4. **Was your journey okay?** → What was the journey like getting here? / How did you travel in?
5. **Are you busy at work right now?** → What's keeping you busy at work at the moment? / What are you working on these days?
6. **Do you know many people here?** → How do you know the people here? / Who have you connected with so far?

Master these moves — a warm opener, safe topics, generous listening, a crisp pitch, and a graceful exit — and networking stops being something you endure and becomes something you do well. The room full of strangers is, after all, simply a room full of conversations waiting to begin.

Reports, Proposals & Formal Writing

Structuring longer business documents with clarity and authority

An email can be forgiven a rough edge or two, but a report or proposal is a document of record. It is read by people you may never meet, circulated to decision-makers, and sometimes filed for years. Length raises the stakes: the longer the document, the more a reader depends on its structure to find the way through. This chapter shows you how to build longer business documents that are easy to navigate, objective in tone, and persuasive where they need to be. We will work section by section through the formal report, examine the architecture of a proposal, and assemble a phrase bank you can reuse with confidence.

The anatomy of a formal report

A report is not a story told in the order events happened; it is information arranged so that a busy reader can stop reading at almost any point and still leave with the essentials. The conventional sequence below has survived because it serves that reader well. Not every report needs every section, but the order rarely changes. A short internal update may collapse several sections into a single page, while a strategic review for the board may run to forty pages with a dozen appendices; the underlying logic is identical. Master the full structure first, and you can scale it down to fit the occasion with confidence.

One principle governs the whole document: the reader should never have to read everything to understand the essentials. This is why the most important material appears earliest, in the summary, and the supporting detail migrates towards the back, into the findings and appendices. Information is layered, not hidden. A reader with two minutes reads the summary; a reader with ten minutes adds the conclusions and recommendations; a specialist with an hour works through the findings and appendices. Each layer is complete in itself, and each is consistent with the others.

Title page

The title page carries the document's title, the author or department, the intended audience, a reference or version number, and the date. A good title is informative rather than decorative: "*Reducing Customer Churn in the SME Segment: Q3 Review and Options*" tells the reader more than "*Churn Report*." State precisely what the document covers and, where useful, the period it covers.

Executive summary

The executive summary is the most-read and least-read section at once: senior readers may read only this, while others skip it entirely. Write it last but place it first. In a single page or less, it states the purpose, the key findings, the main conclusions, and the headline recommendations. It must stand alone, so avoid references such as "*as shown below*" and spell out anything the reader cannot see. Use the past or present tense, full sentences, and no jargon that a non-specialist board member would not recognise.

Introduction and background

The introduction sets the scene. It states why the report was commissioned, defines its scope (what is and is not covered), notes any limitations, and outlines the structure to follow. Background information gives the reader the context needed to understand the findings: the problem that prompted the work, relevant history, and the terms of reference. This is where you also describe your methodology, that is, how the information was gathered, so that readers can judge how much weight to give your conclusions.

Findings

Findings are the facts: what the data, interviews, or observations actually show. The cardinal rule here is objectivity. Report what you found without yet saying what you think it means. Use neutral verbs (**the data indicate**, **respondents reported**, **figures show**), attribute claims to their source, and let numbers and tables do the talking. Findings are often organised under themed sub-headings and supported by charts, with the raw detail moved to an appendix.

Analysis and discussion

Here the report shifts from *what* to *so what*. Analysis interprets the findings, explains patterns, compares options, weighs causes against effects, and acknowledges uncertainty. This is the intellectual core of the document, and it is

where hedged, careful language earns its place: *"this suggests," "a likely explanation is," "it appears that."* Keep analysis separate from findings so that a sceptical reader can check your reasoning against your evidence.

Conclusions

Conclusions are the judgements you draw from the analysis. They answer the question the report was set up to address. A conclusion introduces no new evidence; it distils what the body has already established. Strong conclusions are specific and follow logically from the discussion.

Recommendations

Recommendations state what should be done as a result of the conclusions. They are forward-looking, actionable, and ideally prioritised. Each recommendation should be traceable to a conclusion, and each should be specific enough that a reader knows who must do what, by when.

Appendices and references

Appendices hold supporting material that would interrupt the flow of the main text: full data sets, questionnaires, detailed calculations, and technical notes. Anything in an appendix must be referred to from the body, or it has no reason to be included. References and a list of sources lend credibility and let readers verify your claims.

CONCLUSIONS VS RECOMMENDATIONS

These two sections are confused more often than any other. A **conclusion** looks backward and interprets: it says what the evidence *means* (*"Customer churn is driven mainly by slow onboarding, not price."*). A **recommendation** looks forward and prescribes: it says what to *do* (*"The onboarding process should be reduced from fourteen days to five."*). A useful test: if a sentence could begin with *"Therefore, we should..."* it is a recommendation; if it could begin with *"This shows that..."* it is a conclusion.

The language of each section

The phrase banks below give you ready-made language for the moments that recur in almost every report. Adapt the wording, but keep the register formal and the meaning precise.

PHRASE BANK: OPENING SECTIONS

Section	Language / purpose
Executive summary	"This report examines... and sets out a series of recommendations." · "The principal findings are that..." · "Three options were assessed; the second is recommended." · "In summary, the evidence points to..."
Introducing purpose	"The purpose of this report is to..." · "This report was commissioned in order to..." · "The aim of the study was to assess..." · "This document responds to the Board's request of [date]."
Defining scope	"The report focuses on... and does not address..." · "The scope is limited to the [period/region/department]." · "Matters relating to X fall outside the scope of this review."
Describing methodology	"Data were collected through..." · "A sample of 240 customers was surveyed." · "The analysis is based on internal records for the period..." · "Interviews were conducted with..."

PHRASE BANK: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND OUTCOMES

Section	Language / purpose
Presenting findings objectively	"The data indicate that..." · "Respondents reported..." · "Sales fell by 12% over the period." · "A clear majority (68%) stated that..." · "No significant difference was observed between..."
Analysing & interpreting	"This suggests that..." · "One explanation for this pattern is..." · "These figures can be attributed to..." · "It is worth noting that..." · "This finding is consistent with..."
Drawing conclusions	"It can be concluded that..." · "The evidence strongly suggests that..." · "On balance, it is clear that..." · "These results lead to the conclusion that..."
Making recommendations	"It is recommended that..." · "We suggest that the company..." · "[Action] should be considered as a priority." · "We propose a phased rollout, beginning with..."
Referencing data & appendices	"As shown in Figure 3,..." · "See Appendix B for the full breakdown." · "Table 2 summarises the responses." · "Detailed calculations are provided in Appendix C."

A formal writing style

Reports and proposals share a register that is more impersonal and controlled than everyday correspondence. The following habits distinguish polished formal writing.

Objectivity and tone

Formal writing keeps the writer's personality in the background and the evidence in the foreground. Prefer *"The results were disappointing"* to *"I was gutted by the results."* Attribute opinions, qualify claims you cannot fully prove, and avoid loaded or emotive words. Avoid contractions (**do not**, not **don't**) and colloquialisms.

Passive and active voice

Active voice is usually clearer and shorter, and modern style guides favour it. The passive, however, has legitimate uses in reports: when the doer is unknown, irrelevant, or deliberately unnamed, or when you want to foreground the action rather than the actor. *"A survey was conducted"* rightly keeps the focus on the survey. Use the passive by choice, not by reflex; a report written entirely in the passive becomes ponderous.

Nominalisation, with caution

Nominalisation turns verbs and adjectives into nouns: *decide* becomes *decision*, *implement* becomes *implementation*. Used sparingly, nominalised forms lend precision and a measured tone. Overused, they drain energy from your prose and bury the action. Compare *"The implementation of a reduction in costs was undertaken"* with the leaner *"We reduced costs."* Reach for the verb first; nominalise only when the noun genuinely reads better.

Cohesion and signposting

In a long document, linking words and signposts are the handrails that keep the reader oriented. Use connectors to show the relationship between ideas: **consequently**, **in contrast**, **furthermore**, **nevertheless**, **as a result**. Signpost the structure explicitly: *"This section examines three factors."* · *"The remainder of the report is organised as follows."* · *"Having reviewed the findings, we now turn to..."* Parallel structure also aids cohesion: keep items in a list grammatically alike (*"to reduce costs, to improve quality, and to shorten lead times"*), never mixing forms (*"reducing costs, improve quality, and lead times"*).

BEWARE WORDINESS AND NOUN PILE-UPS

Two faults compound each other in weak reports: empty padding and over-nominalisation. Padding such as *"due to the fact that," "in order to," "at this moment in time,"* and *"it should be noted that"* can almost always be cut or shortened (to *because, to, now,* and nothing at all). Noun pile-ups such as *"a customer retention rate improvement strategy implementation"* force the reader to decode a stack of nouns. Unpack them into verbs and short phrases: *"a strategy to improve how we retain customers."* If a sentence runs past two lines, suspect both faults.

Writing proposals

A proposal is a report with a purpose: it asks the reader to say yes. Where a report informs, a proposal persuades, and its structure follows the logic of a decision. A reliable sequence runs problem, solution, benefits, costs, timeline, and call to action.

- **Problem.** Establish that a real, pressing problem exists, framed in the reader's terms. *"Current onboarding takes fourteen days, and 30% of new customers leave before completing it."*
- **Solution.** Present your proposed course of action clearly and concretely. *"We propose an automated onboarding workflow that reduces setup to three days."*
- **Benefits.** Translate the solution into value the reader cares about: revenue, risk, time, reputation. Quantify wherever you can.
- **Costs.** Be transparent about price, effort, and trade-offs. Hiding costs destroys trust; framing them against the benefits builds it.
- **Timeline.** Show that the plan is feasible, with phases, milestones, and owners.
- **Call to action.** Tell the reader exactly what decision you are asking for and by when. *"We request approval to begin phase one by 1 September."*

Proposal language is persuasive yet professional. It uses confident, benefit-led phrasing (*"This approach would enable us to..."*, *"The main advantage is..."*, *"By acting now, the company would..."*) while remaining honest about limita-

tions. Avoid hype; specifics persuade decision-makers far more than superlatives. A claim such as "a revolutionary, game-changing platform" invites scepticism, whereas "a platform that cut processing time by 40% in the pilot" earns trust. The conditional forms **would**, **could**, and **enable** are the workhorses of proposal writing: they project a confident future without overclaiming.

Anticipating objections is the mark of a mature proposal. Decision-makers rarely approve a plan they have not mentally argued against, so addressing the obvious counter-arguments inside the document strengthens rather than weakens your case. Phrases such as "It might be argued that the cost is high; however, the projected saving exceeds it within a year" or "While there is some implementation risk, this can be mitigated by a phased rollout" show that you have thought the matter through. Acknowledge the trade-off, then answer it. A proposal that pretends to have no downside is less persuasive than one that names its risks and shows them to be manageable.

Annotated sample excerpts

The two excerpts below show the principles in action. Notes after each line explain the choices an experienced writer makes.

Executive summary (excerpt)

This report examines the causes of rising customer churn in the SME segment during the first half of 2026 and sets out four recommendations for the Board's consideration. *[Purpose and scope in one sentence; says what follows.]*

Churn rose from 8% to 14% over the period. Analysis of survey data and account records indicates that the principal driver is a slow onboarding process rather than price, as is commonly assumed. *[Headline finding, then a conclusion that corrects a likely belief; no reference to charts the reader cannot see.]*

It is recommended that the onboarding workflow be automated and reduced from fourteen days to five, at an estimated cost of £40,000. This investment is projected to recover within eight months through retained revenue. *[Lead recommendation with cost and payback, so a senior reader can decide from the summary alone.]*

Recommendations section (excerpt)

On the basis of the findings, the following actions are recommended, in order of priority: *[Signposts that recommendations are prioritised and grounded in evidence.]*

1. It is recommended that the onboarding process be automated and shortened to five days, with the IT team owning delivery by Q4 2026. *[Specific action, owner, and deadline — fully actionable.]*
2. We suggest that a dedicated success manager be assigned to each new SME account for the first ninety days. *[Softer "we suggest" for a measure that is advisable rather than urgent.]*
3. Pricing should be reviewed once the onboarding changes have taken effect, since the current evidence does not support price as a primary driver of churn. *["Should be" plus a clear rationale; deliberately sequenced after the higher-priority work.]*

Precision in recommendations

Vague recommendations are where good reports go to die. A recommendation that names no action, owner, or measure gives the reader nothing to approve. Compare the two versions below.

Vague: "Customer service should be improved to reduce churn." (Improved how? By whom? Measured against what?)
Precise: "It is recommended that the support team reduce average first-response time from 24 hours to 4 hours by Q4, by adding two agents and introducing a triage system." (Action, target, deadline, and means — the reader can say yes or no.)

Exercise

Part A — Order the report. The sections below are listed out of order. Arrange them into the conventional sequence of a formal report.

Findings · Title page · Recommendations · Executive summary · Conclusions · Appendices · Introduction and background · Analysis and discussion

Part B — Make it precise. Rewrite each vague recommendation so that it specifies an action, and where possible a measure, owner, or deadline. Invent reasonable details.

1. "Our website should be made better."
2. "Communication between departments needs to improve."
3. "We should think about reducing costs at some point."

ANSWER KEY

Part A (correct order): 1. Title page · 2. Executive summary · 3. Introduction and background · 4. Findings · 5. Analysis and discussion · 6. Conclusions · 7. Recommendations · 8. Appendices.

Part B (model answers — your wording may differ):

1. *"It is recommended that the marketing team redesign the website to reduce average page-load time from 6 seconds to under 2 seconds and increase the mobile conversion rate by 15% by Q3."*
2. *"We suggest introducing a weekly fifteen-minute cross-department stand-up, owned by team leads, to be trialled for three months from September."*
3. *"It is recommended that the finance team identify operating-cost reductions of 8% within the next two quarters and present options to the Board by 30 September."*

In each case the precise version names a concrete action and, where it can, attaches a measurable target, an owner, and a date — turning an aspiration into a decision the reader can approve.

Job Search, Interviews & Career English

CVs, cover letters, and answering interview questions with confidence

Looking for a new role is one of the most demanding tasks you will ever do in English. You have to describe years of experience in a few short bullet points, persuade a stranger to read your application, and then talk about yourself fluently under pressure. The good news is that recruiters and interviewers use a surprisingly predictable set of questions and phrases. Once you learn the patterns in this chapter, you can prepare answers in advance, sound polished and professional, and let your real experience shine through. This chapter takes you from the written application — the CV and cover letter — through to the spoken interview, giving you ready-made language, phrase banks, and a proven framework for telling your professional story.

1. Writing a strong CV / resume

A **CV** (curriculum vitae, common in the UK, Europe and much of the world) or **resume** (the usual American word) is a marketing document, not a job description. Recruiters often spend only seconds on a first read, so every line must earn its place. The single most important skill is writing powerful, results-focused bullet points.

The golden formula

Strong CV bullets almost always follow one simple pattern:

Action verb + task / what you did + quantified result.

Notice that the bullet starts with a strong verb in the past simple (or present simple for your current job), drops the word "I", and ends with a number or measurable outcome wherever possible. Numbers create credibility and help you stand out.

TIP: QUANTIFY EVERYTHING YOU CAN

A result becomes far more persuasive when it is measurable. Ask yourself: *How much? How many? How often? In what time frame? Compared to what?* Use percentages (*increased sales by 30%*), amounts (*managed a £2m budget*), time saved (*cut processing time from 5 days to 2*), scale (*led a team of 12*), or frequency (*published 4 reports per quarter*). If you do not have an exact figure, a careful estimate ("approximately", "around", "over") is still stronger than nothing.

Action verbs that get noticed

Replace weak, passive phrases like *was responsible for* or *helped with* with precise action verbs. Choose a verb that matches the real level of your contribution.

STRONG CV ACTION VERBS WITH EXAMPLE BULLET POINTS

Action verb	Means roughly	Example bullet (verb + task + result)
Achieved	reached a goal or target	Achieved 118% of annual sales target, the highest in a team of 9.
Led	directed people or a project	Led a cross-functional team of 12 to deliver a new app on schedule.
Delivered	completed and handed over	Delivered 15 client projects on time and 8% under budget.
Implemented	put a plan or system into action	Implemented a new CRM system, improving lead tracking for 40 staff.
Streamlined	made a process simpler/faster	Streamlined the invoicing process, reducing errors by 25%.
Spearheaded	led a new initiative from the front	Spearheaded the launch into three new markets across Asia.
Increased	made a number go up	Increased website conversion from 2.1% to 3.4% in six months.
Reduced	made a number go down	Reduced customer churn by 18% through a new onboarding programme.
Negotiated	reached an agreement on terms	Negotiated supplier contracts, saving the company €120,000 a year.
Developed	created or built something new	Developed a training curriculum now used by all new hires.

Action verb	Means roughly	Example bullet (verb + task + result)
Managed	was in charge of	Managed a portfolio of 30 key accounts worth £4m in revenue.
Optimised	improved efficiency	Optimised the supply chain, cutting delivery times by 40%.

Weak bullet: Was responsible for social media and helped grow the audience. **Strong bullet:** Managed three social channels and grew the combined audience from 8,000 to 25,000 followers in one year.

CV VS RESUME: A QUICK NOTE

In the US, a **resume** is a short (1–2 page) targeted summary, while a **CV** is a long academic document. In the UK and most other countries, "CV" simply means the standard 1–2 page job-application document. Keep yours concise, use reverse-chronological order (most recent job first), and tailor it to each role.

2. Describing yourself professionally

Both your CV profile and your interview answers benefit from a few well-chosen adjectives. Avoid empty buzzwords; instead, pick adjectives you can back up with an example.

USEFUL PROFESSIONAL ADJECTIVES

Adjective	Meaning	Example sentence
Proactive	acting in advance, not waiting to be told	I'm proactive — I spotted the reporting gap and built a dashboard before anyone asked.
Detail-oriented	careful and accurate with small details	I'm detail-oriented, so I catch errors before they reach the client.
Collaborative	good at working with others	I'm collaborative and enjoy bringing different teams together around a shared goal.
Resilient	able to recover from setbacks	I'm resilient; after we lost a major bid, I refocused the team and won the next two.
Adaptable	able to change with the situation	I'm adaptable and thrive when priorities shift at short notice.
Analytical	good at examining data and problems	I'm analytical and like to base decisions on solid evidence.
Self-motivated	driven without needing supervision	I'm self-motivated and comfortable working independently from home.
Personable	friendly and easy to get along with	Clients tell me I'm personable, which helps me build long-term trust.

3. The cover letter and application email

A **cover letter** (or a covering email when you apply online) introduces you, explains why you are right for the role, and persuades the reader to open your CV. Keep it to three or four short paragraphs. The structure below works almost every time.

COVER LETTER / APPLICATION EMAIL PHRASE BANK

Purpose	Useful phrases
Opening — the role & where you saw it	I am writing to apply for the role of Marketing Manager, advertised on your careers page. / I was excited to see your posting for a Data Analyst on LinkedIn.
Why you (your fit)	With over five years' experience in... / I bring a proven track record of... / In my current role at X, I have...
Evidence / a quantified highlight	For example, I recently led a project that increased revenue by 20%. / I am particularly proud of having reduced costs by €50,000.
Why them (the company)	I have long admired your commitment to sustainability. / What attracts me to your company is your reputation for innovation. / Your focus on X aligns closely with my own values.
Call to action	I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how I could contribute to your team. / I would be delighted to tell you more in an interview. / Please find my CV attached for your consideration.

Purpose	Useful phrases
Sign-off (named recipient)	Yours sincerely, [Name]
Sign-off (no name known)	Yours faithfully, [Name] — used after "Dear Sir or Madam". Kind regards / Best regards is also acceptable for email.

A NOTE ON BRITISH LETTER CONVENTIONS

In traditional British English, if you open with the recipient's name (*Dear Ms Patel*) you close with *Yours sincerely*. If you do not know the name (*Dear Sir or Madam*), you close with *Yours faithfully*. For email applications, *Kind regards* or *Best regards* is now widely accepted and slightly less formal.

4. Interview language

Interviews feel unpredictable, but most questions fall into a handful of categories. Prepare a flexible answer for each one and you will rarely be caught off guard.

"Tell me about yourself"

This is usually the opening question. Do not tell your life story. Use the *Present – Past – Future* structure: who you are now, the experience that brought you here, and why this role is the logical next step.

"TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF" PHRASE BANK

Stage	Useful phrases
Present (now)	I'm currently a... at... where I'm responsible for...
Past (how you got here)	Before that, I spent three years... / I started my career in...
Future (why this role)	Now I'm looking to take on more responsibility in... which is exactly why this role appeals to me.

Strengths and weaknesses

TALKING ABOUT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Purpose	Useful phrases
Naming a strength	One of my key strengths is... / I'd say I'm particularly good at... / Colleagues often rely on me to...
Backing it up	For instance, in my last role I... / A good example of that is...
Naming a weakness honestly	An area I'm actively working on is... / In the past I used to... / I sometimes...
Showing growth (essential!)	...but I've improved this by... / ...so now I make a point of... / I've learned to manage this by...

"Why do you want this job?" and "Why should we hire you?"

MOTIVATION AND FIT PHRASE BANK

Question	Useful phrases
Why do you want this job?	What really draws me to this role is... / I'm excited by the chance to... / This position is a great fit because it combines... with...
Why this company?	I've followed your work on... / I admire how you... / Your values around X really resonate with me.
Why should we hire you?	I bring a rare combination of... / What sets me apart is... / I can hit the ground running because...

Handling "Tell me about a time..." — the STAR method

Behavioural questions ("Tell me about a time when you handled a conflict / missed a deadline / led a team") are best answered with the **STAR** method. It keeps your answer structured, concrete and easy to follow.

KEY: THE STAR METHOD

S — Situation: set the scene briefly. *"Last year, our biggest client threatened to leave after a delivery error."*

T — Task: explain your responsibility. *"As account manager, it was my job to keep the relationship and fix the problem."*

A — Action: describe what you did, step by step. *"I called the client the same day, apologised, traced the error to our warehouse, and set up a weekly check-in."*

R — Result: give the outcome, with a number if you can. *"They stayed with us and actually increased their order by 15% the following quarter."*

Spend most of your answer on the **Action** and end on a strong **Result**. Always say "I", not "we", when describing your own contribution.

WARNING: CLICHÉS AND RED-FLAG ANSWERS

Interviewers hear the same tired lines hundreds of times. Avoid these traps:

"My biggest weakness is that I'm a perfectionist / I work too hard." This sounds rehearsed and dishonest. Name a real, manageable weakness and show how you are improving.

"I just need a job" or criticising your current employer. Speaking badly about a past boss is a major red flag — stay positive and professional.

Empty buzzwords with no evidence: "I'm a team player, a hard worker and a people person." Replace these with a short, specific example.

"I don't have any questions." This suggests a lack of interest. Always prepare two or three questions.

Weak answer (to "Tell me about a time you solved a problem"): "Yeah, we had lots of problems at my last job and we usually just sorted them out as a team. I'm good under pressure."

Strong answer (STAR): "When our online checkout started failing during a sale (Situation), I was asked to find the cause fast (Task). I pulled the error logs, identified a payment-gateway timeout, and coordinated with the developers to deploy a fix within two hours (Action). We recovered an estimated £40,000 in sales that day and I wrote a checklist to prevent it happening again (Result)."

A STAR answer in action

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult team member?

Candidate: Of course. Last year I was leading a six-month product launch, and one of our senior designers kept missing internal deadlines, which was holding up the whole team.

Interviewer: So what was your responsibility in that?

Candidate: As project lead, it was my job to keep us on schedule without damaging the relationship. So rather than escalating straight away, I arranged a private one-to-one to understand what was going on.

Interviewer: And what did you actually do?

Candidate: It turned out he was overloaded with work from another project. I renegotiated his priorities with the other manager, broke his tasks into smaller weekly milestones, and set up a short Monday check-in. I also made sure he got credit for his work in our review meetings.

Interviewer: And how did it turn out?

Candidate: He hit every deadline for the rest of the project, we launched on time, and he later told me it was the most supported he'd felt in a long while. The launch went on to beat its first-quarter target by around 20%.

Asking the interviewer questions

Near the end, you will hear: *"Do you have any questions for us?"* Always say yes. Good questions show genuine interest and help you judge whether the job is right for you.

SMART QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Topic	Question
The role	What would success look like in this role after the first six months?
The team	Could you tell me a little about the team I'd be working with?
Challenges	What's the biggest challenge facing the team right now?

Topic	Question
Growth	How do you support professional development here?
Next steps	What are the next steps in the process, and when might I expect to hear back?

Discussing salary

Salary can feel awkward, but a calm, prepared approach signals confidence. Where possible, let the employer raise a number first, and frame your expectations as a researched range rather than a fixed figure.

SALARY DISCUSSION PHRASE BANK

Purpose	Useful phrases
Deflecting an early question	I'd prefer to learn a bit more about the role first, but I'm flexible and open to discussing it.
Giving a researched range	Based on my research and experience, I'd expect something in the region of X to Y.
Asking about the budget	May I ask what range you've budgeted for this position?
Negotiating politely	I'm very interested in the role. Is there any flexibility on the base salary? / Could we look at the overall package?
Buying time on an offer	Thank you — I'm delighted. Would it be possible to take a day to review the details?

Closing the interview strongly

End on a confident, warm note. Reaffirm your interest and thank them for their time.

CLOSING PHRASES

Purpose	Useful phrases
Reaffirming interest	I just want to say how excited I am about this opportunity. / This conversation has confirmed that the role is a great fit for me.
Thanking them	Thank you very much for your time today — I've really enjoyed our conversation.
The follow-up email	Thank you again for meeting me today. I remain very enthusiastic about the role and look forward to hearing from you.

TIP: SEND A THANK-YOU EMAIL WITHIN 24 HOURS

A short, warm follow-up email after the interview is expected in many cultures and rare enough to make you memorable. Thank the interviewer, mention one specific point from the conversation, and restate your interest in two or three sentences. Keep it brief and genuine.

5. Practice exercise

Part A — Improve the weak CV bullets. Rewrite each weak bullet using the formula *action verb + task + quantified result*. (Invent reasonable numbers.)

1. Was responsible for the company's social media accounts.
2. Helped the team save some money on suppliers.
3. Worked on a project to make the reporting process better.
4. Did training for new members of staff.

Part B — Match the interview question to the best answering strategy.

Question	Strategy
1. Tell me about yourself.	a. Use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).
2. Tell me about a time you missed a deadline.	b. Name a real weakness, then show how you are improving it.
3. What's your biggest weakness?	c. Use Present – Past – Future and keep it professional.
4. Do you have any questions for us?	d. Ask a prepared question about the role, team, or next steps.

ANSWER KEY

Part A (model answers — yours may differ):

1. Managed three social media accounts and grew the combined following by 60% in twelve months.
2. Negotiated new supplier contracts, saving the company around €45,000 a year.
3. Streamlined the monthly reporting process, cutting preparation time from three days to one.
4. Developed and delivered an onboarding programme for over 30 new staff, reducing time-to-productivity by two weeks.

Part B: 1 – c; 2 – a; 3 – b; 4 – d.

Master the language in this chapter and the job search stops feeling like a test of your English and starts feeling like a conversation about your achievements. Prepare your CV bullets, rehearse two or three STAR stories, learn the phrase banks, and you will walk into any interview ready to present the strongest possible version of yourself.

Grammar Essentials for Professionals

The high-impact grammar points that make business English correct and clear

You do not need to name every grammatical structure to write a clear email or chair a confident meeting. What you need is a reliable command of the handful of points that carry most business communication: the tenses that report progress, the modals that soften a request, the conditionals that negotiate a deal, and the small words — articles, prepositions, quantifiers — that quietly mark a message as professional or careless. This chapter gathers those high-impact essentials in one place. Each point comes with a short explanation, real workplace examples, and a side-by-side comparison so you can see the error and the fix together. Treat it as a reference you return to, not a list you memorise once.

1. Tenses at work

English has many tenses, but business writing leans heavily on four contrasts. Master these and you will express most of what a working day requires.

Present simple vs present continuous

Use the **present simple** for facts, routines, permanent situations, and scheduled events. Use the **present continuous** for actions in progress now, temporary situations, and — importantly in business — fixed future arrangements.

PRESENT SIMPLE VS PRESENT CONTINUOUS IN THE WORKPLACE

Use the present simple for...	Use the present continuous for...
Facts: <i>Our head office is in Geneva.</i>	Now: <i>I'm reviewing the figures as we speak.</i>
Routines: <i>We report results every quarter.</i>	Temporary: <i>I'm covering for Maria this week.</i>
Timetables: <i>The flight leaves at 09:00.</i>	Arrangements: <i>I'm meeting the client on Thursday.</i>
Procedures: <i>The system locks accounts after five attempts.</i>	Trends: <i>Costs are rising across the sector.</i>

Some verbs (so-called **stative verbs**) describe states rather than actions and are normally not used in the continuous: *know, understand, agree, need, want, prefer, believe, own, mean.*

INCORRECT

✗ I am knowing the answer. We are needing your approval today, and I am agreeing with the proposal.

CORRECT

✓ I know the answer. We need your approval today, and I agree with the proposal.

Present perfect vs past simple

This is the contrast learners get wrong most often, and it changes meaning. Use the **past simple** for finished actions at a finished time — when you say (or imply) *when*. Use the **present perfect** for actions connected to now: recent news, experience up to the present, or a result that still matters, with no specific past time stated.

“I HAVE SENT” VS “I SENT”

Present perfect (link to now)	Past simple (finished time)
<i>I've sent the contract. (It's in your inbox now.)</i>	<i>I sent the contract on Monday.</i>
<i>We've already signed three clients this year.</i>	<i>We signed three clients last year.</i>
<i>Have you finished the report yet?</i>	<i>Did you finish the report yesterday?</i>

Four signal words travel with the present perfect. *Since* marks a starting point (*since 2019, since Monday*); *for* marks a duration (*for three years, for two weeks*). *Already* means sooner than expected (positive); *yet* asks or reports that something is still pending (questions and negatives).

INCORRECT

✗ I work here since 2019. I have sent the invoice last week. Did you receive my email already?

CORRECT

✓ I have worked here since 2019. I sent the invoice last week. Have you received my email yet?

NOTE

American English often accepts the past simple where British English prefers the present perfect (*Did you eat yet?* vs *Have you eaten yet?*). In international business writing, the present perfect with *already / yet / just* is the safer, more widely accepted choice.

Future forms

English has no single future tense; it has several forms with different meanings. Choosing well makes you sound precise.

TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Form	Use it for	Example
will + verb	Decisions made now, offers, promises, predictions	<i>I'll call them back this afternoon.</i>
going to + verb	Plans/intentions decided earlier; evidence-based predictions	<i>We're going to launch in Q3.</i>
present continuous	Fixed arrangements with a time and often other people	<i>I'm presenting to the board on Friday.</i>
will be + -ing (future continuous)	An action in progress at a future point; polite, neutral plans	<i>I'll be travelling next week, so responses may be slow.</i>

The future continuous (*I'll be sending...*) is useful at work because it sounds less abrupt and less pushy than *will*: *I'll be contacting you shortly* feels routine and unthreatening, whereas *I will contact you* can sound like a warning.

INCORRECT

✗ I will meet the supplier tomorrow at 10 — it's in both our calendars. Look, the share price will fall; the chart is already down.

CORRECT

✓ I'm meeting the supplier tomorrow at 10 — it's in both our calendars. Look, the share price is going to fall; the chart is already down.

2. Modal verbs for function

Modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, must, should, would, will, shall*) add meaning — ability, permission, obligation, possibility, advice — without changing the main verb. They never take *-s* in the third person and are followed by the bare infinitive (no *to*).

MODALS BY FUNCTION

Function	Modals	Example
Ability	can / could (past)	<i>She can read a balance sheet. I couldn't open the file.</i>
Requests	can → could → would	<i>Could you send the deck? Would you mind reviewing it?</i>
Permission	can / may (formal)	<i>May I share these figures externally?</i>
Obligation	must / have to / should	<i>All staff must complete training. You should reply today.</i>
Possibility	may / might / could	<i>The deal might close this week.</i>
Advice	should / ought to	<i>You should double-check the totals.</i>
Deduction	must (certain) / can't (impossible)	<i>They must be busy; they can't have forgotten.</i>

Must vs have to vs should

Must expresses strong obligation, often from the speaker or from rules. *Have to* expresses obligation from outside (circumstances, regulations) and is more common in everyday speech, especially in the past and future, where *must* has no

forms (*had to*, *will have to*). Crucially, the negatives differ in meaning: *mustn't* = it is prohibited; *don't have to* = it is not necessary. *Should* is weaker — advice or recommendation, not a command.

INCORRECT

✗ You *mustn't* attend the optional webinar if you're busy. Yesterday I *must* rewrite the whole proposal.

CORRECT

✓ You *don't have to* attend the optional webinar if you're busy. Yesterday I *had to* rewrite the whole proposal.

The politeness gradient

The same request can sound blunt or gracious depending on the modal. Moving from *can* to *could* to *would* — and adding *possibly* or *mind* — raises politeness. Use more distance with people you do not know well or with sensitive requests.

FROM DIRECT TO HIGHLY POLITE

Register	Request
Direct	<i>Can you send the report?</i>
Polite	<i>Could you send the report?</i>
More polite	<i>Would you be able to send the report?</i>
Very polite	<i>Would you mind sending the report when you have a moment?</i>

TIP

After *Would you mind*, use the *-ing* form, not the infinitive: *Would you mind **checking** this?* (not *to check*). And remember the answer is inverted: agreeing to the request is “*No, not at all*”, because you are saying you do not mind.

3. Conditionals in business

Conditionals link a condition to a result. In negotiations and planning they let you make offers, set terms, give warnings, and discuss hypotheticals. Learn the patterns by what they *do*, not just their numbers.

THE CONDITIONAL PATTERNS

Type	Form	Business use & example
Zero	if + present, present	General truths/rules: <i>If a payment is late, we charge interest.</i>
First	if + present, will/can	Real future offer/condition: <i>If you order today, we'll waive the fee.</i>
Second	if + past, would/could	Hypothetical/diplomatic: <i>If we lowered the price, would you commit to a larger volume?</i>
Third	if + past perfect, would have	Past regret/criticism: <i>If we had signed earlier, we would have saved 10%.</i>
Mixed	if + past perfect, would (now)	Past cause, present result: <i>If we had hired more staff, we wouldn't be behind schedule now.</i>

The second conditional is the negotiator's friend: the past-tense form (*if we lowered...*) signals that you are exploring, not committing, which keeps talks safe and face-saving. Note that we do not use *will* or *would* in the *if*-clause itself.

INCORRECT

✗ If you *will* confirm by Friday, we send the goods. If we would reduce the rate, would you sign?

CORRECT

✓ If you confirm by Friday, we'll send the goods. If we reduced the rate, would you sign?

4. Articles: a / an / the / zero

Articles are tiny but error-prone, especially for speakers whose languages have none. Use **a/an** for one non-specific singular countable noun mentioned for the first time. Use **the** when both speaker and reader know which one (something already mentioned, unique, or made specific). Use **zero article** (no article) for plural and uncountable nouns spoken about in general.

CHOOSING THE ARTICLE

Article	When	Example
a / an	First mention, one of many; <i>an</i> before a vowel sound	<i>We need a strategy and an honest review.</i>
the	Specific, already known, or unique	<i>The strategy we agreed is working.</i>
zero	General plurals and uncountables; most company/people names	<i>Prices are rising. Information is power.</i>

Choose *a* or *an* by sound, not spelling: *a university* (“yoo”), *an hour* (silent h), *an MBA* (“em”), *a CEO* (“see”).

INCORRECT

✗ She is the engineer with a MBA. We discussed the budget on a phone for an hour. Prices are most important factor.

CORRECT

✓ She is an engineer with an MBA. We discussed the budget on the phone for an hour. Prices are the most important factor.

5. Prepositions in fixed business phrases

Many prepositions follow a noun, verb, or adjective by convention, not logic, so they have to be learned as fixed pairs. Getting them right is one of the clearest signals of fluent, professional English.

REFERENCE: HIGH-FREQUENCY BUSINESS COLLOCATIONS

Phrase	Example
responsible for	<i>She is responsible for the EMEA region.</i>
in charge of	<i>He is in charge of logistics.</i>
depend on	<i>The launch depends on funding.</i>
interested in	<i>We're interested in a partnership.</i>
apply for	<i>I'd like to apply for the role.</i>
deal with	<i>Our team deals with complaints.</i>
agree with (a person/opinion)	<i>I agree with your analysis.</i>
agree on (a decision/topic)	<i>We agreed on a deadline.</i>
agree to (a proposal)	<i>They agreed to our terms.</i>
on schedule / on time	<i>The project is on schedule.</i>
focus on	<i>Let's focus on Q4 targets.</i>
specialise in	<i>We specialise in compliance software.</i>

INCORRECT

✗ I'm responsible of marketing and I depend of the data team. We need to discuss about the budget.

CORRECT

✓ I'm responsible for marketing and I depend on the data team. We need to discuss the budget.

NOTE

Some common verbs take no preposition at all: *discuss, contact, enter, phone, request*. Say *discuss the issue* (not *discuss about*), *contact me* (not *contact with me*), *enter the room* (not *enter into*, except in fixed legal phrases like *enter into an agreement*).

6. Countable, uncountable, and quantifiers

Uncountable (mass) nouns cannot be counted directly, so they take no *a/an*, have no plural *-s*, and use a singular verb. Several of the most frequent business words are uncountable, and learners routinely make them plural. *An information* and *informations* are both wrong.

COMMON UNCOUNTABLE BUSINESS NOUNS

Uncountable noun	To count it, say...
------------------	---------------------

Uncountable noun	To count it, say...
information	a piece of information / some information
advice	a piece of advice / some advice
feedback	some feedback / a comment
research	a piece of research / a study
equipment	a piece of equipment / an item
software	a piece of software / an application
staff	a member of staff / staff (plural verb)
news, progress, work, training, luggage	some news, some progress, a lot of work

Quantifiers must match the noun type. Use *many, few, fewer, a number of* with countables; use *much, little, less, an amount of* with uncountables. *Some, any, a lot of, plenty of, enough* work with both.

INCORRECT

✗ I have an important information and many feedbacks.
Our staff is very experienced and they works hard. We made many progress.

CORRECT

✓ I have an important piece of information and a lot of feedback. Our staff are very experienced and they work hard. We made a lot of progress.

7. Agreement, relative clauses, and word confusions

Subject-verb agreement

The verb must agree with the true subject, not with a nearby noun. Watch out when words come between the subject and verb, and learn which collective nouns are treated as singular.

- *The list of attendees **is** ready.* (subject = *list*, not *attendees*)
- *Each of the departments **has** a target.* (*each* is singular)
- *The team **is** meeting today* (the unit) / *The team **are** arguing among themselves* (the individuals).
- *Neither the manager nor the directors **were** informed.* (the verb agrees with the nearer subject)

Relative clauses: which / that / who

Use *who* for people, *which* for things, and *that* for either — but only in *defining* clauses (those that identify which one and take no commas). In *non-defining* clauses, which add extra, non-essential information, use *who* or *which* with commas, never *that*.

DEFINING VS NON-DEFINING

Type	Example
Defining (no commas)	<i>The supplier that missed the deadline lost the contract.</i>
Non-defining (commas)	<i>Our main supplier, which is based in Italy, raised its prices.</i>
People	<i>The analyst who wrote the report is on leave.</i>

INCORRECT

✗ Our CEO, that joined in 2020, will retire. Send it to the client who details are below.

CORRECT

✓ Our CEO, who joined in 2020, will retire. Send it to the client whose details are below.

Words professionals confuse

EASILY CONFUSED PAIRS

Pair	Difference & example
its / it's	<i>its</i> = possessive; <i>it's</i> = it is/has. <i>The firm raised its forecast. It's the best quarter yet.</i>
affect / effect	<i>affect</i> = verb (to influence); <i>effect</i> = noun (a result). <i>The delay will affect costs. The effect was severe.</i>
fewer / less	<i>fewer</i> + countable; <i>less</i> + uncountable. <i>Fewer errors, less waste.</i>

Pair	Difference & example
e.g. / i.e.	e.g. = for example; i.e. = that is (clarifies). <i>perks (e.g. a car); the deadline, i.e. Friday.</i>
principal / principle	<i>principal</i> = main / head person; <i>principle</i> = a rule/belief. <i>the principal reason; a matter of principle.</i>
their / there / they're	possessive / place / they are. <i>They're sending their team there.</i>

TOP 10 MISTAKES BUSINESS LEARNERS MAKE

1. *since* with the wrong tense: use the present perfect (*I have worked here since 2019*).
2. Present perfect + a finished time: not *I have sent it yesterday*, but *I sent it yesterday*.
3. *will* in the *if*-clause: *If you confirm* (not *If you will confirm*).
4. Plurals on uncountables: *information, advice, feedback, equipment* never take *-s*.
5. Wrong prepositions: *responsible for, depend on, discuss* (no *about*).
6. Missing or wrong articles: *an MBA, the most important factor*.
7. *mustn't* vs *don't have to* (prohibition vs no obligation).
8. *that* in a non-defining clause: use *who/which* with commas.
9. Subject-verb agreement after long phrases: *The list of items is...*
10. *its/it's* and *affect/effect* confusions in writing.

TIP – PROOFREAD IN PASSES

Do not try to catch everything at once. Read your text three times, each with one focus: first for tenses and verb agreement; second for the small words (articles, prepositions, *its/it's*); third read it aloud to catch awkward rhythm and missing words. Use your software's spell-checker but never trust it blindly — it will not flag *their* for *there* or *affect* for *effect*. Leave high-stakes documents for an hour before the final read; fresh eyes find what tired ones miss.

Exercise: find and fix the mistake

Each sentence below contains exactly one grammar error of the kind covered in this chapter. Rewrite each one correctly.

1. We have signed the contract last Tuesday.
2. She is responsible of the new product line.
3. I need an advice about the negotiation.
4. If you will send the file, I will review it today.
5. Our manager, that joined last year, is very supportive.
6. The list of suppliers are attached to this email.
7. You mustn't come to the optional session if you're busy.
8. I work for this company since 2018.
9. We received many feedbacks from the survey.
- o. The delay will badly effect our delivery schedule.

ANSWER KEY

1. We **signed** the contract last Tuesday. (finished time → past simple)
2. She is responsible **for** the new product line. (fixed preposition)
3. I need **some advice** (or *a piece of advice*) about the negotiation. (uncountable)
4. If you **send** the file, I will review it today. (no *will* in the *if*-clause)
5. Our manager, **who** joined last year, is very supportive. (non-defining clause about a person)
6. The list of suppliers **is** attached to this email. (subject = *list*)
7. You **don't have to** come to the optional session if you're busy. (no obligation, not prohibition)
8. I **have worked** for this company since 2018. (present perfect with *since*)
9. We received **a lot of feedback** from the survey. (uncountable, no plural)
10. The delay will badly **affect** our delivery schedule. (verb = *affect*)

Grammar in business English is not about passing a test; it is about being understood quickly and trusted instantly. The points in this chapter are the ones that do the heavy lifting in real correspondence and conversation. Return to the ta-

bles when you draft, run the three-pass proofread before you send, and within a few weeks the corrections you make consciously here will become the choices you make automatically.

Numbers, Data & Describing Trends

Talking about figures, charts, and change with precision

In business, numbers carry the message. A figure read aloud incorrectly, a percentage confused with a percentage point, or a chart described in vague language can cost credibility in a meeting or an entire deal in a negotiation. This chapter gives you the confidence to say any number out loud, to round and approximate naturally, and to describe how figures move over time. By the end, you will be able to present a sales chart, comment on a forecast, and compare quarters fluently, using the same toolkit that experienced analysts and executives rely on every day.

Saying numbers correctly

The first skill is simply reading numbers aloud the way a native speaker would. Written figures are universal; spoken figures are not. Below are the conventions that matter most in international business.

Large numbers

English groups large numbers in threes and reads them in blocks. Note the British habit of inserting *and* before the final two digits, which American English usually drops.

READING LARGE NUMBERS ALOUD

Figure	British English	American English
365	three hundred and sixty-five	three hundred sixty-five
1,250	one thousand, two hundred and fifty	twelve hundred fifty / one thousand two hundred fifty
40,000	forty thousand	forty thousand
2,400,000	two point four million	two point four million
1,000,000,000	one billion (a thousand million)	one billion

A NOTE ON "BILLION"

Today, both British and American English use **billion** to mean a thousand million (1,000,000,000). The old "long scale" British billion (a million million) is obsolete in finance and the press, so you can treat a billion as 10^9 everywhere. A **trillion** is a thousand billion.

Decimals, fractions and ratios

Decimals are read digit by digit after the point: *3.14* is "three point one four," never "three point fourteen." The whole-number part keeps its normal name. Currency amounts are an exception — see below.

DECIMALS, FRACTIONS AND RATIOS

Written	Spoken
0.5	(nought / zero) point five — BrE often "nought point five"
2.75	two point seven five
0.025	nought point oh two five
$\frac{1}{2}$	a half / one half
$\frac{3}{4}$	three quarters
$2\frac{1}{3}$	two and a third
$\frac{7}{8}$	seven eighths
3:1	three to one (a ratio of three to one)
50:50	fifty-fifty

Percentages, currency, dates and the rest

EVERYDAY BUSINESS FIGURES

Type	Written	Spoken
Percentage	4.5%	four point five percent
Currency	€1,499.99	one thousand four hundred and ninety-nine euros (and) ninety-nine (cents)
Currency (informal)	\$2.5m	two and a half million dollars / two point five million dollars
Date (BrE)	9 March 2026	the ninth of March twenty twenty-six
Date (AmE)	March 9, 2026	March ninth, twenty twenty-six
Year	1995	nineteen ninety-five
Year	2009	two thousand (and) nine
Year	2020	twenty twenty
Phone number	020 7946 0018	oh two oh, seven nine four six, double oh one eight
Ordinal	21st	twenty-first

Reading the figure 0

English has several names for zero, and choosing the right one signals fluency.

FIVE WAYS TO SAY 0

Word	Used for	Example
zero	maths, science, temperature, neutral default	"Growth was close to zero."
oh /əʊ/	phone numbers, account numbers, years, times	"Room four-oh-six." / "two thousand and oh-five"
nought (BrE)	decimals, casual arithmetic	"nought point seven five"
nil (BrE)	scores, totals reduced to nothing	"Profit was nil." / "two-nil"
love	tennis only	"forty-love"

Approximation and precision

Real data is messy, so professionals constantly signal how exact a figure is. Rounding sounds confident; false precision sounds naïve. Match your language to your certainty.

SIGNALLING HOW EXACT A NUMBER IS

Degree	Phrases	Example with 19,800
Loose approximation	roughly, around, about, more or less, in the region of, in the ballpark of	"around twenty thousand"
Close approximation	approximately, almost, nearly, just under, just over, give or take	"just under twenty thousand" / "twenty thousand, give or take"
Range / limit	up to, at least, no more than, between ... and ..., somewhere in the order of	"between nineteen and twenty thousand"
Full precision	exactly, precisely, to be exact, to the nearest pound	"nineteen thousand, eight hundred precisely"

TIP – SOUND NATURAL WHEN YOU ROUND

Put the approximator before the number, not after: "*about* forty percent," not "forty percent *about*." The one common exception is *give or take* and *or so*, which follow: "ten thousand *or so*," "forty minutes, *give or take*."

Describing trends: the core vocabulary

Most data talk is about *change* — figures going up, going down, or staying flat. English splits this into verbs of movement, the matching nouns, and the adverbs/adjectives that describe *how much* and *how fast*.

Verbs of change

VERBS OF UPWARD, DOWNWARD AND FLAT MOVEMENT

Verb	Meaning	Example
rise / increase / grow	go up (neutral)	"Revenue rose by 8% last year."
climb	go up steadily, often with effort	"The share price climbed to a record high."
surge / soar / rocket	go up fast and far	"Online orders surged over the holiday."
fall / decline / drop / decrease	go down (neutral)	"Costs fell in the second quarter."
plunge / plummet / slump	go down fast and far	"Bookings plunged after the announcement."
dip	go down slightly, then often recover	"Demand dipped briefly in August."
level off / plateau / stabilise	stop changing; become flat	"Inflation levelled off at 3%."
fluctuate	go up and down irregularly	"Prices fluctuated all summer."
peak	reach the highest point	"Sales peaked in December."
bottom out	reach the lowest point before recovering	"The market bottomed out in March."

NOTE – PREPOSITIONS OF MOVEMENT

Use *rise by* for the size of the change, *rise to* for the new level, *rise from ... to ...* for both, and *rise at* a rate. For example: "Profit rose **by** €2m, **from** €8m **to** €10m, **at** an annual rate of 25%."

Matching nouns

Every verb of change has a noun form, used in the very common pattern *there was a + (adjective) + noun + in*.

NOUN FORMS OF CHANGE

Verb	Noun	Example
rise	a rise	"There was a rise in exports."
increase	an increase	"a sharp increase in demand"
fall / decline	a fall / a decline	"a steady decline in costs"
drop	a drop	"a slight drop in attendance"
surge	a surge	"a surge in applications"
slump	a slump	"a dramatic slump in sales"
fluctuation	a fluctuation	"wide fluctuations in price"
peak	a peak	"a peak of 12,000 units"

Adverbs and adjectives of degree and speed

The adverb modifies the *verb*; the adjective modifies the *noun*. They come in matching pairs.

HOW MUCH / HOW FAST

Adjective (+ noun)	Adverb (+ verb)	Means
sharp	sharply	a lot, suddenly
dramatic	dramatically	a very large, striking amount
significant	significantly	a large, meaningful amount
steady	steadily	continuously, at a constant rate
gradual	gradually	slowly, little by little
slight	slightly	a small amount
marginal	marginally	a very small amount
rapid	rapidly	quickly

KEY – VERB + ADVERB = ADJECTIVE + NOUN

These two structures say the same thing. Learn them as a single switchable unit:

Verb + adverb: "Sales *rose sharply* in Q4." **Adjective + noun:** "There was *a sharp rise* in sales in Q4."

Likewise: *fell steadily* → *a steady fall*; *grew dramatically* → *a dramatic increase*; *dropped slightly* → *a slight drop*. Being able to flip between the two lets you avoid repetition and vary your sentence rhythm in a presentation.

Describing charts and making comparisons

When you present a graph, you usually do three things: state a figure, describe its movement, and compare it with something else. The phrases below cover all three.

USEFUL CHART AND COMPARISON PHRASES

Function	Phrase	Example
State a level	the figure stands at / now stands at / reached	"Headcount now stands at 480."
State a share	X accounts for / makes up / represents Y% of	"Europe accounts for 40% of revenue."
Compare two figures	compared with / in comparison with / as against	"€6m, compared with €4m last year."
Multiples	twice as high as / three times the size of / half of	"Q4 was twice as high as Q1."
"X-fold" change	a tenfold increase / a fourfold rise	"There was a tenfold increase in users."
Trend over time	over the period / year on year / quarter on quarter	"Margins improved year on year."
Highlight	notably / in particular / it is worth noting that	"Notably, Asia outperformed."

NOTE – "TWICE AS HIGH" VS "TWICE HIGHER"

Say "*twice as high as*" (correct), not "twice higher than." For increases, "a tenfold increase" means the figure became ten times its original size. Avoid the ambiguous "increased by ten times" in formal writing.

A worked example

Presenter describing the quarterly sales chart:

"Let me walk you through this quarter's figures. Sales started the year at roughly €1.2 million in January and climbed steadily through the spring, reaching a peak of just over €1.8 million in April. After that we saw a slight dip in May – down to around €1.7 million – before the figure stabilised over the summer. The really striking movement comes in the final quarter: orders surged sharply in November, and December sales soared to €2.4 million, almost twice as high as the January figure. Overall, that represents a forty-percent increase year on year. Online channels in particular performed well; they now account for some 55% of total revenue, compared with 38% twelve months ago – close to a twofold rise in share. The figure for in-store sales, by contrast, levelled off at about €1.1 million and has barely fluctuated since the summer."

WARN – THREE CLASSIC NUMBER MISTAKES

- "Percent" vs "percentage point."** If a rate moves from 4% to 6%, that is a rise of **two percentage points**, but a rise of **fifty percent** (because 2 is 50% of 4). These are not interchangeable, and confusing them can badly misstate performance.
- Commas and points across regions.** In English (UK/US), a comma marks thousands and a point marks the decimal: *1,250.50*. In much of continental Europe these are reversed: *1.250,50*. When presenting to a mixed audience, say the number aloud to remove all doubt.
- Singular vs plural.** Write "a 5% increase" (adjective, no plural) but "5 percent of staff." And remember "ten thousand," never "ten thousands," when a number precedes it.

Exercise

Part A – Write these figures out in words (British English).

- 1,460

2. 0.25
3. €3,200.50
4. 2018 (the year)
5. 3:1 (a ratio)

Part B — Fill each gap with the best trend word from the box. (*soared, levelled off, slight, bottomed out, sharp, fluctuated*)

1. After months of decline, the market finally _____ in March and began to recover.
2. Demand was unpredictable all year; prices _____ constantly.
3. There was only a _____ drop in attendance — just 2%.
4. Following the product launch, downloads _____ to a record high.
5. Inflation rose quickly in the spring, then _____ at around 3%.
6. The company reported a _____ increase in profits, up 40% on last year.

ANSWER KEY

Part A: 1. one thousand, four hundred and sixty. 2. nought point two five (or zero point two five). 3. three thousand, two hundred euros (and) fifty cents. 4. two thousand and eighteen (or twenty eighteen). 5. three to one.

Part B: 1. bottomed out. 2. fluctuated. 3. slight. 4. soared. 5. levelled off. 6. sharp.

Glossary of Business Terms

A quick-reference dictionary of 150+ essential business words and abbreviations

This glossary collects the words, abbreviations, and acronyms you are most likely to meet in emails, meetings, reports, and everyday office conversation. Each entry gives one clear, learner-friendly definition in international English, grouped alphabetically for fast look-up.

A

Term	Definition
Accounts payable	The money a company owes to its suppliers for goods or services bought on credit.
Accounts receivable	The money owed to a company by its customers for goods or services already delivered.
Acquisition	The purchase of one company, or a controlling share of it, by another company.
Agenda	A list of the topics to be discussed at a meeting, usually in order.
AOB	Abbreviation for "any other business," the final agenda item where additional topics can be raised.
ASAP	Abbreviation for "as soon as possible," used to request quick action.
Asset	Anything of value that a company owns, such as cash, equipment, property, or stock.
Audit	An official, independent inspection of a company's accounts or processes to check they are accurate and lawful.
Appraisal	A formal review of an employee's performance, usually held once or twice a year.
Amortisation	The gradual writing off of the cost of an intangible asset, such as a patent, over its useful life.

B

Term	Definition
B2B	Abbreviation for "business to business," describing companies that sell to other companies rather than to consumers.
B2C	Abbreviation for "business to consumer," describing companies that sell directly to individual customers.
Balance sheet	A financial statement showing a company's assets, liabilities, and equity at a single point in time.
Bandwidth	Informally, the time, energy, or capacity a person or team has to take on extra work.
Benchmark	A standard or point of reference against which performance can be measured and compared.
Bottleneck	A stage in a process that slows everything down because it cannot handle the volume passing through it.
Bottom line	A company's net profit or loss; more broadly, the most important point or final result.
Brand	The name, design, and reputation that make a company's products recognisable and distinct.
Break-even point	The level of sales at which total revenue exactly covers total costs, so there is no profit or loss.
Budget	A plan that sets out expected income and spending over a period of time.
Buy-in	The agreement and active support of the people needed to make a decision or project succeed.

C

Term	Definition
Capital	The money or assets a business uses to fund its operations and growth.
Cash flow	The movement of money into and out of a business over a period of time.
CEO	Chief executive officer, the most senior manager responsible for the overall running of a company.

Term	Definition
CFO	Chief financial officer, the senior executive responsible for managing a company's finances.
Churn	The rate at which customers stop using a company's product or service over a given period.
COO	Chief operating officer, the senior executive responsible for a company's day-to-day operations.
Commission	A payment to a salesperson based on the value of the sales they make.
Compliance	The act of following the laws, regulations, and internal rules that apply to a business.
Conversion rate	The percentage of potential customers who take a desired action, such as making a purchase.
CRM	Customer relationship management, the systems and software used to track and manage interactions with customers.
CTA	Call to action, a marketing prompt that tells the audience exactly what to do next, such as "Sign up now."
Cross-selling	Encouraging an existing customer to buy additional, related products or services.

D

Term	Definition
Deadline	The latest time or date by which a task must be finished.
Deliverable	A specific, tangible output that a project is expected to produce.
Depreciation	The gradual reduction in the recorded value of an asset over its useful life.
Disruption	A radical change, often driven by new technology, that transforms an existing market or industry.
Dividend	A share of a company's profits paid to its shareholders, usually as cash.
Downsizing	Reducing the size of a company's workforce to cut costs.
Due diligence	The careful investigation of a business or deal before signing a contract or making an investment.
Deadlock	A situation in a negotiation where neither side will move and no agreement can be reached.
Demographics	The statistical characteristics of a population, such as age, income, and location, used to target customers.

E

Term	Definition
EBITDA	Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation; a measure of a company's core operating profit.
E-commerce	The buying and selling of goods and services over the internet.
EOD	Abbreviation for "end of day," a common deadline meaning by the close of the working day.
EOM	Abbreviation for "end of month," used for deadlines or reporting cut-offs.
Equity	The value of ownership in a company after its liabilities are subtracted from its assets.
ETA	Estimated time of arrival, the expected time at which something or someone will arrive or be ready.
Expenditure	The total amount of money that a business spends.
Expense	A cost incurred in the course of running a business.

F

Term	Definition
Feedback	Information given about someone's work or a product, used to guide improvement.
Forecast	An estimate of future performance, such as expected sales or revenue.
Freelancer	A self-employed person who works for different clients without a permanent contract.
Fringe benefits	Extra rewards given to employees in addition to salary, such as health insurance or a company car.

Term	Definition
FY	Financial year (or fiscal year), the twelve-month period a company uses for accounting and reporting.
FYI	Abbreviation for "for your information," used to share something without requiring action.

G

Term	Definition
GDP	Gross domestic product, the total value of all goods and services produced by a country in a year.
Goodwill	The value of a company's reputation, brand, and customer relationships beyond its physical assets.
Gross margin	The percentage of revenue left after subtracting the direct cost of producing goods or services.
Gross profit	Revenue minus the direct costs of producing the goods or services sold, before other expenses.

H

Term	Definition
Headcount	The total number of people employed by a company or team.
Headhunter	A recruiter who actively seeks out skilled candidates, often for senior positions.
HR	Human resources, the department responsible for hiring, training, pay, and employee welfare.

I

Term	Definition
Incentive	A reward, often financial, designed to encourage a particular behaviour or performance.
Inflation	A general rise in prices over time, which reduces the purchasing power of money.
Influencer	A person with a large online following who can affect their audience's buying decisions.
Invoice	A document sent to a customer requesting payment for goods or services supplied.
IPO	Initial public offering, the first sale of a company's shares to the public on a stock exchange.
ROI	See "Return on investment."

J

Term	Definition
Job description	A written summary of the duties, responsibilities, and requirements of a particular role.
Joint venture	A business arrangement in which two or more parties combine resources for a specific project, sharing risk and profit.
Just-in-time	A system in which materials or stock arrive exactly when needed, to reduce storage costs.

K

Term	Definition
Key account	A customer that is especially important to a company because of its size or strategic value.
KPI	Key performance indicator, a measurable value that shows how well a goal or target is being met.

L

Term	Definition
Lead	A potential customer who has shown interest in a product or service.
Lead time	The amount of time between the start of a process and its completion, such as ordering and delivery.

Term	Definition
Liability	A debt or financial obligation that a company owes to others.
Liquidity	How easily a company's assets can be converted into cash to pay short-term obligations.
Logistics	The detailed organisation of moving, storing, and delivering goods and resources.
Layoff	The dismissal of employees, usually temporarily or because of a shortage of work.
Leverage	The use of borrowed money to increase the potential return of an investment; also, using something to gain advantage.

M

Term	Definition
Margin	The difference between the cost of a product and its selling price, usually expressed as a percentage.
Market share	The portion of total sales in a market that is held by a particular company or product.
Merger	The joining of two companies to form a single new organisation.
Milestone	A significant point or event marking progress in a project.
MoM	Month on month, a comparison of a figure with the same figure in the previous month.
Monopoly	A situation in which a single company controls the entire supply of a product or service in a market.
MVP	Minimum viable product, a basic version of a product released to test the market with the least effort.

N

Term	Definition
NDA	Non-disclosure agreement, a contract in which parties agree to keep certain information confidential.
Net profit	The money left after all costs, taxes, and expenses have been subtracted from total revenue.
Networking	Building and maintaining professional relationships that can help your career or business.
Niche	A small, specialised segment of a market with particular needs.

O

Term	Definition
Onboarding	The process of introducing and integrating a new employee or customer into a company.
OOO	Abbreviation for "out of office," indicating that a person is away and unavailable for work.
Operating costs	The ongoing expenses of running a business day to day, such as rent, wages, and utilities.
Outsourcing	Paying an outside company to carry out work that could be done internally.
Overhead	The fixed, ongoing costs of running a business that are not tied directly to producing a product.

P

Term	Definition
P&L	Profit and loss statement, a financial report summarising revenues, costs, and expenses over a period.
Pipeline	The series of potential sales or projects at various stages of progress toward completion.
Pitch	A short, persuasive presentation made to win a customer, investor, or client.
PR	Public relations, the practice of managing how a company's image and information reach the public.
Procurement	The process of finding, agreeing terms, and buying goods or services for a business.
Productivity	A measure of how efficiently work is turned into output, often per worker or per hour.
Profit margin	The percentage of revenue that remains as profit after costs are deducted.

Term	Definition
Prospect	A potential customer who fits the profile of someone likely to buy.

Q

Term	Definition
Q1–Q4	The four quarters (three-month periods) into which a financial year is divided for reporting.
Quarter	A three-month period used for financial reporting and planning.
Quota	A fixed target, such as a minimum number of sales a person is expected to achieve.
Quote	A statement of the price at which a supplier will provide goods or services.

R

Term	Definition
R&D	Research and development, the work a company does to create new products or improve existing ones.
Recession	A period of significant decline in economic activity, usually lasting several months or more.
Recruitment	The process of finding, attracting, and hiring new employees.
Redundancy	The loss of a job because the position is no longer needed, not because of poor performance.
Retention	A company's ability to keep its customers or employees over time.
Return on investment	Often shortened to ROI, a measure of the profit gained from an investment relative to its cost.
Revenue	The total income a company earns from its normal business activities before costs are deducted.
RFP	Request for proposal, a document inviting suppliers to bid for a project by submitting their offers.

S

Term	Definition
SaaS	Software as a service, software delivered online by subscription rather than installed on a computer.
Scalability	The ability of a business or system to grow and handle increased demand without major problems.
Shareholder	A person or organisation that owns one or more shares in a company.
SLA	Service level agreement, a contract that defines the standard of service a provider must deliver.
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise, a business below a certain size in staff numbers or turnover.
Stakeholder	Any person or group with an interest in a business or project, such as staff, customers, or investors.
Startup	A young company, often in technology, designed to grow quickly and built around a new idea.
Stock	Goods kept in storage for sale; also, the shares representing ownership in a company.
Supply chain	The full network of people and steps involved in producing and delivering a product to the customer.
SWOT	An analysis of a business's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.
Synergy	The extra value created when two companies or teams combine and achieve more together than apart.

T

Term	Definition
Target market	The specific group of customers a company aims its products and marketing at.
Turnover	The total sales revenue of a company over a period; also, the rate at which employees leave and are replaced.

U

Term	Definition
Upselling	Persuading a customer to buy a more expensive or upgraded version of a product.
USP	Unique selling point (or proposition), the feature that makes a product different from its competitors.

V

Term	Definition
VAT	Value-added tax, a tax added to the price of most goods and services at each stage of production and sale.
Venture capital	Money invested in young, high-risk companies in exchange for a share of ownership.
Vendor	A company or person that sells goods or services to a business.

W

Term	Definition
Working capital	The money available for a company's day-to-day operations, calculated as current assets minus current liabilities.
Workflow	The sequence of steps and tasks that work passes through from start to finish.
Write-off	An amount recorded as a loss because it can no longer be collected or has lost its value.

Y

Term	Definition
YoY	Year on year, a comparison of a figure with the same figure in the previous year.
YTD	Year to date, the period from the start of the current year up to the present day.

BRITISH VS AMERICAN BUSINESS ENGLISH

International teams mix both varieties, so it helps to recognise common differences. A British *CV* is an American *résumé*; British *turnover* often means American *revenue*; British *shares* are usually called *stock* in the US. A senior boss may be a *managing director* in Britain but a *CEO* in America. Watch out for the *ground floor* (British) versus the *first floor* (American) for the same level, and for time off called *holiday* in Britain but *vacation* in America. Finally, a British *mobile* phone is an American *cell* phone. Neither variety is "more correct" — consistency within a single document matters most.