

Worksheets - Meetings (2): Getting involved in meetings**Questionnaire: Meetings in English**

Complete this questionnaire about meetings in English and keep a record of your answers. Explain your answers to your partner, using examples where possible. Be honest!

1. You're at a brainstorming meeting where everyone is speaking English. The other participants seem to speak much better English than you. You have lots of ideas and opinions about their ideas. What do you usually do?
 - a. I interrupt others frequently in order to express my opinions, even though I know I make lots of basic mistakes with my English.
 - b. I wait for my turn to present my opinions, and then try to express myself as clearly as I can.
 - c. I only speak if someone asks me for my opinion, and keep my answers short to avoid mistakes.

2. You're at a meeting in English where several participants are sitting silently and just listening. What do you do?
 - a. I ignore them – if they have nothing to say, they shouldn't be there.
 - b. I feel sorry for them – perhaps they are having problems with the language.
 - c. I do everything I can to involve them, by inviting them to speak and preventing others from interrupting them.

3. You're at a meeting where a junior colleague clearly can't speak English properly, and they keep making really basic mistakes like "it don't work". How do you feel?
 - a. Superior. My English is much better, and I'm glad I don't sound so stupid when I speak.
 - b. Irritated. If they can't speak English, they shouldn't be at this meeting.
 - c. Impressed. My colleague is demonstrating excellent self-confidence and determination to overcome a language barrier. And they're making lots of useful contributions to the meeting.

4. At your meeting, everyone is talking at the same time in English. You can follow their conversations, but you're a few seconds behind. By the time you've thought of something to say, and planned how to say it, the conversation has moved on. How often do you experience this feeling?
 - a. All the time.
 - b. Quite often.
 - c. Rarely or never.

5. You are at a meeting in English where you understand about 60–80% of what you hear. What do you do?
 - a. Keep interrupting to check what's going on. It's a bit embarrassing and frustrating for others, but it's important that I understand.
 - b. Participate actively in the meeting. From time to time I'll misunderstand the topic and my contributions will sound a bit stupid, but I'm prepared to take the risk.
 - c. Sit quietly and listen so as to avoid sounding stupid by talking about the wrong topic.

6. Who is responsible for overcoming your problems with English?
 - a. Nobody. I make mistakes but it's not a problem. I'm paid for my professional skills, not for being an expert in English.
 - b. My employer. They should provide more English lessons and give me time to study. My teacher could also do more to improve my English. Also, the other people at meetings should try to help me more.
 - c. Me.

Analysis

Check your score and read the analysis. Discuss with a partner whether you agree. Try to come up with some good advice for the three types of person.

Score key:

Q1: a: 10 b: 0 c: -10

Q2: a: 10 b: 0 c: -10

Q3: a: -5 b: -10 c: 10

Q4: a: -10 b: -5 c: 10

Q5: a: 5 b: 10 c: -10

Q6: a: 10 b: -10 c: 0

If you scored between -60 and -30, you are too much of a **perfectionist** to participate actively in meetings in English. This is completely normal – most people hate making mistakes and looking stupid in front of their colleagues. But your colleagues may think even worse of you if you say nothing at all. You should ...

If you scored between -25 and 25, you are a fairly **typical user** of English, with some good strategies for getting involved. However, there's always room for improvement. You could ...

If you scored between 30 and 60, you are a **risk-taker**. You have a lot of self-confidence, which means you can function effectively in English at work despite problems with the language. However, you may be rather dominant in group discussions. Also, some people may see your care-free attitude to English as a reflection of your care-free attitude to work. You should ...

Strategies

Now match these strategies with the type of person who needs them most, *perfectionists* or *risk-takers*. (Typical users would benefit from all of the strategies).

- a. Record yourself speaking at a meeting in English (e.g. using a Dictaphone). Later, listen to your 'performance' (e.g. while travelling home from work) and try to correct some of the mistakes you hear.
- b. Learn a few "interrupting phrases" like *Can I just say something?* or *Sorry to interrupt, but* These phrases will give you time to plan what you're going to say. The best one-word interrupting phrase is *But ...*, or you could simply say the person's name.
- c. Learn hundreds of new words. Be systematic and organised – if you learn 10 new words per day for a year, you can increase your vocabulary by 3650 words! Think what that would do for your fluency and confidence.
- d. Actively try to involve less confident colleagues by asking their opinions frequently and listening patiently while they speak.
- e. Instead of simply presenting your opinions (*I think ...*), use questions (*What about if we ...?*; *Do you think ...?*) and question tags (*That would work, wouldn't it?*) to involve others.
- f. Go for it! Speaking English in public is like learning to ride a bike. If you analyse it too much, you'll convince yourself it's impossible. But once you've done it a few times, it'll feel more natural.
- g. Ask a colleague what bad habits you have with English grammar or pronunciation. Then try to correct yourself when you're speaking fluently. It'll slow you down a bit, but soon you'll notice it gets easier and faster to be accurate.
- h. Learn some phrases for checking understanding (e.g. *What exactly do you mean by X?*; *Sorry – I didn't catch that last word.*) and make sure you use them. Remember, there's no point in going to a meeting if you don't understand. It may feel embarrassing to keep asking for clarification, but it's worse to sit in silence, and worst of all if your misunderstanding leads to professional mistakes.
- i. If somebody interrupts you, give them a chance to speak, especially if you know that person isn't very confident about using English in meetings. If they hesitate, encourage them with phrases like *Go on* or *After you*.
- j. Don't let other people interrupt you too easily. Hold the floor with phrases like *Can I just finish my point?* or *I'll let you speak in a second*.

Useful language

ALLOWING OTHERS TO CONTINUE	
CHECKING YOU'VE UNDERSTOOD / SPECIFYING THE PROBLEM	
INTERRUPTING	
INVITING OTHERS TO GET INVOLVED	
PREVENTING AN INTERRUPTION	
a. After you.	n. Sorry, but could you speak up a little. It's difficult to hear you.
b. But ...	o. Sorry – I didn't catch that last word.
c. Can I just check I've understood you correctly?	p. Sorry ... I interrupted you. You were saying ...
d. Can I just finish my point?	q. Sorry to interrupt, but ...
e. Can I just say something?	r. Sorry, but I'm really not sure I've understood you correctly.
f. Can I just stop you for a second?	s. Sorry, but you've lost me. What exactly are we talking about?
g. Do you think ...?	t. Sorry, was that <i>owe</i> or <i>own</i> ?
h. Go on.	u. Sorry, you were about to say something and I cut you off.
i. Hang on a second, can you let me finish?	v. That would work, wouldn't it?
j. I'll let you speak in a second.	w. What about if we ...?
k. I'm not familiar with the abbreviation <i>R and D</i> . Can someone help me?	x. What exactly do you mean by ...?
l. I'm sorry, but this is really important.	y. Why don't we ...?
m. OK, I understood almost everything, but not the last bit. What are we voting on now?	z. Would you mind speaking a bit more slowly, please? I'm having trouble keeping up.

Practice
Student A:

Well, **EHO** have asked for a complete **breakdown** of our **P and L** figures. They want our **inventory** figures to be based on **FIFO**. We need that by the end of **Q2**. Does that sound **feasible**?

- EHO = European Head Office
- a breakdown = an analysis of each part of something
- P and L = profit and loss, an important financial report
- inventory = the amount of goods we have in our factory
- FIFO accounting = first in, first out, i.e. in order to calculate costs and profits, accountants assume that the oldest stock is sold first
- Q2 = the second quarter of the year, i.e. April–June.
- feasible = possible, realistic

Student B

We've decided to conduct a complete **overhaul** of our **QMS**. Basically, **VMA** and her team in **O and E** want to aim for **ISO 9001 accreditation**, because they're convinced it'll help them **clinch** the **Madax** deal.

- an overhaul = a complete review and change to a whole system
- QMS = Quality Management System
- VMA = the head of the O and E department, Victoria Mark Austin.
- O and E = Operations and Engineering, the name of a department
- ISO 9001 = a QMS standard published by ISO, the International Organization for Standardization
- accreditation = a process of assessment that may lead to an official certificate or licence
- to clinch a deal = to finalise a deal (= agreement, negotiation), to get the other party to accept it
- Madax = the name of a key client

Role-play 1

Your company wants to organise a **Work–Life Balance day**. The aim of the event is to get employees to see colleagues as people with real lives outside the workplace, and therefore to be more supportive, understanding and friendly towards each other. There is a very limited budget, and the event will take place on a normal working day, without dramatically reducing employees' productivity during that day. You and some other junior members of staff have been asked to plan the events for the day. Hold a brainstorming meeting to plan the event.

Role-play 2

Your company wants to hold a **Staff Integration event**, to enable employees from different teams and work locations to get to know each other and build relationships. You and other senior managers meet to plan a budget for this event (in terms of cost per employee) and to brainstorm ideas for the event.