

Meetings (3): Managing a meeting**Topic:** Managing a meeting**Aims:**

- To study the language and techniques of setting up a meeting by email;
- To practise setting up an email by email;
- To study some useful phrases and techniques for managing a meeting;
- To provide practice and feedback of the situation of managing a meeting.

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above**Introduction**

This lesson focuses on two important aspects of managing a meeting: setting up the meeting with a series of emails, and keep the meeting under control. Two other important parts of managing a meeting, introducing the meeting and closing the meeting, are covered in lessons 1 and 5.

1. Lead-in

Write the following questions on the board. Students discuss the questions in small groups and then share their ideas and experiences with the class.

- a. Have you ever planned, arranged or managed a meeting?
- b. What does each of these tasks involve?
- c. What is the most difficult part of each task?
- d. How tightly does the chairperson need to control the meeting?

Suggested answers

- b.
- Planning a meeting involves deciding whether a meeting needs to take place, how it should take place (e.g. face to face, by teleconference), where and when it should take place, who needs to attend, how long it should last, what it should achieve, how much preparation each participant should do beforehand, etc.
 - Arranging a meeting involves informing the participants about the purpose of and background to meeting, persuading them (or their bosses) why the meeting is important, negotiating a time and place, making sure everyone knows how to prepare, etc.
 - Managing a meeting involves getting the meeting started, explaining the procedures and your expectations, managing the stages of the meeting, making sure everyone is fully involved, keeping the discussion focused, dealing with unexpected problems, making sure decisions are taken and recorded, closing the meeting effectively, following up the meeting by email, etc.

2. Calling a meeting: emails

Cut up the worksheets so that each email (or agenda) is on a separate slip of paper. Divide the class into groups of around three or four, and give each group a set of five slips of paper. Students work in their groups to put the five pieces of writing into the most logical order. Discuss the answers with the class. Make sure everyone agrees on the correct order, as the next task depends on students knowing which email is first, etc.

Answer

The emails and agenda appear in the right order on the worksheets.

3. Analysis

Distribute the worksheet so that each student has a copy. They work in the same groups to discuss tasks 1–4. When they are ready, discuss the answers with the class.

Suggested answers

- 1a. Because she wanted to get straight to the main purpose of the email without spending too long on background details, which instead she put in an attachment.
- b. In order for ... to ...; With this in mind, ...
- c. To overcome potential objections from managers that the meetings will be time-consuming and a waste of time. She focuses first on the importance of the meetings for the company as a whole, and then on the very limited amount of commitment she expects.
- d. To highlight the benefits both for the individuals and their departments. She uses 'as' twice to introduce reasons.
- e. She is very specific about her deadline, but she was not specific about the number of people she needs. A possible explanation is that she only needs one person from each department, but would be happy if more people were involved.
- 2a. She uses powerful language (*very excited, convinced, a tremendous success*). She tries to make each participant feel special by focusing on how important their contributions are to the overall success of the project.
- b. She states her own preference (*preferably, ideally*) but gives people broader limits (*some time next week, tomorrow morning at the latest*) in case her own preferences are unsuitable.
- 3a. The location, the date, the start time and the finish time. She also mentions that the arrangements were based on participants' own suggestions, and mentions an additional attraction of attending (coffee and biscuits).
- b. The one in the second paragraph (*Please make sure ...*) sounds much stronger than the one in the first (*I'd like to invite you to ...*). This is because the participants have already agreed to her first request, at least in principle, and the participants' managers are also expecting the participants to attend. The second request needs to be stronger because people often forget to read the documents, or make excuses about why they haven't prepared.
- c. It is certainly brief, but it is intended to include all the necessary information. As a general rule, the agenda can be a very simple list, with all the detailed information included in other documents.
- d. Any other business, i.e. a chance for people to mention things that are not on the agenda.
- 4a. She uses very powerful language (*incredibly productive, extremely valuable*) to show her appreciation and to motivate the participants to feel positive about the project and their own importance. If this email is also copied to the participants' managers, it will demonstrate to them that Angela appreciates the sacrifices that everyone has made.

- b. Because minutes are a legal record of decisions and commitments made. She also wants to avoid the impression that she is the only person whose opinions count. If there is any disagreement later in the project, Angela can refer to this email to show that, at the time, everyone agreed with the minutes.
- c. As promised, ...; As we discussed, ...

4. Analysis (5): useful phrases

Distribute more copies of the emails, so that each student has his/her own copy. Students work in pairs to underline useful phrases for each function. When you go through the answers with the class, elicit more examples of useful phrases for each function.

Suggested answers

- a. Referring to previous knowledge or conversations: As you may know, ...; Based on the information I received, ...; ... that I sent on Monday ...; As promised, ...; As we discussed, ...
- b. Referring to attachments: I am attaching ... for your information; I'm attaching some background documents, so you can familiarise yourself with ...; attached again for your reference
- c. Explaining reasons: In order for ... to ...; With this in mind, ...; ... as ...; ... so I can ...
- d. Explaining what you want to do: ... we need to ...; ... I'd like to ...; I'll email people individually about ...
- e. Showing understanding: I realise this is a busy time of year for ...
- f. Emphasising key information: ... I'd like to stress that ...; ... of vital importance ...; ... especially the list of ...
- g. Dealing with potential problems: There is no work involved ..., apart from ...
- h. Explaining key benefits: I believe ... will also be beneficial for ..., as they will gain ...; Members will also gain invaluable ...; ... it will be a good chance for ... to ...
- i. Making requests: So could I ask each of you to ...?; Please could you ...?; Could I therefore ask you to ...; Please email me with ...; I'd like to invite you to ...; Please make sure you have ...; Please check them carefully ... and let me know ...
- j. Setting deadlines: ... by the end of this week ...; ... at the latest; ... before the meeting ...
- k. Expressing enthusiasm: ... welcome to ...; I'm very excited about ...; ... I'm convinced that ...; a tremendous success; incredibly productive; extremely valuable
- l. Making suggestions: ... some time next week; as early as possible; preferably ...; ideally
- m. Explaining practical details: The first meeting should last no more than ...; ... will be provided; ... our next meeting will be ...; I'll be in touch closer to that date with an agenda for that meeting
- n. Expressing thanks: Many thanks; Thanks a lot; Thanks to everyone who ...; Thanks again for all your support

5. Practice (email writing)

Students work in pairs to plan their meetings. Encourage them to be spontaneous when generating ideas, and to write down the first ideas that come

into their heads. You could set a very tight time limit for the planning stage (e.g. two minutes) to keep students focused. Allow around ten minutes for the writing stage – again, by keeping a tight time limit, you will encourage students to be brief and to copy useful phrases from Angela’s emails. One student in each pair should dictate to the other, who writes everything down.

At the end of the time limit, ask students to read their emails aloud to the class. Encourage other students to give their own feedback, e.g. was the request too direct? Was the purpose of the email clear enough? Are the instructions to attendees clear?

6. Extracts from a meeting

Make enough copies of the two worksheets for each student to have a copy, with additional copies for each group of 3–4. Cut up these additional copies so that each group has three sets of slips of paper: 1–12, 13–24 and 25–32.

Divide the class into groups and give each group the first set of slips to put into the correct order. Point out that sometimes Angela has two turns one after the other, and that the symbol [...] shows the passage of time between separate parts of the meeting. Point out also that the first and last slips in each set are numbered in the right order.

The teams then race to put the conversations in the right order. As each team finishes the first set, give them the next set to sort. The first team to correctly sort all three sets is the winner. You could check the answers by asking volunteers to act out the conversations for the class.

Answers

See worksheets: the conversations are given in the correct order.

7. Analysis

Distribute the worksheets so that each student has a copy of both the conversations and the analysis. Students then work in pairs to find and underline useful phrases for each function. Point out that all the phrases are used by Angela, as she is managing the meeting.

When you check with the class, you could elicit more examples of useful phrases for each function.

Suggested answers

- a. Welcoming and thanking: OK, so let me start by welcoming you all to ...; Thanks a lot for ..., and thanks also for ...; Your support is very much appreciated; That would be really useful, thanks.
- b. Signalling different stages of the meeting: I’m going to begin with a brief presentation now on ...; Right ... so that brings me to the end of the presentation. Are there any questions?; OK, so if nobody has any more questions at this stage ... no? ... I’d like to move on to the next point on the agenda, which is ...

- c. Avoiding trying to deal with two or more points at once: Well, that's really two questions; I'll come back to your question in a moment; OK ... so let's take them one at a time.
- d. Asking somebody to be more specific: Bruno, what exactly is it that you're worried about?; What would you say are the main issues related to ...?; What would you say are the main issues?
- e. Dealing with interruptions: OK, that's great to hear, but I'm not sure that's what Bruno's worried about; OK, Diego, can you let Christina finish, please?
- f. Checking whether you've understood: Bruno, do you think ..., or that ...?; So you're saying we need to ..., rather than ...?
- g. Summarising: OK, so we've identified a possible problem with ..., and there are concerns that ...; Great, well, we've had lots of good ideas already, and I've got pages of really useful notes.
- h. Keeping the meeting focused on the agenda: Well, hang on a second, I don't think we should be going into this much detail at this stage; Remember, we've only got an hour today; Perhaps we can come back to identifying very specific recommendations at our next meeting; We can certainly talk about ... then; OK, well, I think that's really a question for ...; All I know is that ..., but I can't say anything about ...
- i. Recording notes and minutes: I'll just add it to my notes; And I'll add it to the list of Action Points ... Erik to send round ...
- j. Prompting people to get involved, especially people who don't want to speak: But I want to come back to something Christina said earlier; Christina, you said you were worried about ...?; Are you sure?; Do you think ...?; Erik, you've been very quiet; Do you have anything to add?; Really? I was hoping you might be able to say something about ...; I just want to be extra sure we're not missing anything important. Like ... I don't know, if we need to ...
- k. Requesting specific action: Diego, perhaps you could answer Christina's question, briefly?; Could you send round ...?

8. Practice

Divide the class into groups of around four. Go through the instructions carefully to make sure everyone understands. If you have odd numbers in some groups, you will need to adjust the timing so that all groups finish around the same time (e.g. six minutes per student in a group of three, four minutes per student in a group of five).

Note that students could show each other the emails they wrote earlier, as a quicker way of explaining the purpose of their meetings.

Encourage students to use some of Angela's phrases to manage their meetings. Make sure everyone understands that when they are playing the role of attendees, they should cause problems for the chairperson but not too many problems. The aim is to give each chairperson practice of controlling a meeting, not a group of naughty children!

Monitor carefully. At the end, give and elicit feedback on the effectiveness of the meetings from the chairperson's point of view.

