

Worksheets – Meetings (1): Getting down to business**Reading: Text 1****Let's stop wasting time and get on with it!**

Did you know you can download a clock from the internet to calculate the cost of your meetings? All you need to do is type in the number of attendees at the meeting and their average hourly wage, and start the clock. As the seconds tick away and you see how much those seconds are costing your company, you'll start to appreciate what a terrible waste of time – and money – most meetings are.

So what can you do? Firstly, make sure everyone arrives on time. No excuses. If five people at a meeting are sitting around waiting for a sixth person to turn up, just think how much money you are throwing away.

Secondly, get most of the work done before the meeting. That means sending round detailed agendas, with clear instructions for all participants telling them what they need to do to prepare for the meeting. Again, accept no excuses if someone fails to prepare properly. That means the meeting itself can focus on problem-solving and decision-making rather than wasting time explaining the problem that needs to be solved or the decision that needs to be made.

Thirdly, stick to the agenda. Don't let anyone hijack the meeting by chatting about something irrelevant. If they want to talk about those things, let them call their own meeting. Don't let them take over yours.

Fourthly, set a time limit and stick to it. There's nothing worse than a meeting that goes round and round in circles with no decisions ever being finalised. A time limit can be a great way to focus everyone's minds on the purpose of the meeting and the need to achieve something concrete ... and then to go back to work and start implementing the decisions.

Of course small talk has its place, but that place is not a meeting.

Reading: Text 2**Small talk is the cement that holds businesses together**

Did you know that 50% of business communication is actually small talk? Small talk is a vital part of working with other people: finding out what they're doing, what they're having problems with, and what they think they should be doing differently. Perhaps even more importantly, it's about getting to know your colleagues and business partners as people, not just as business machines. Business is very largely based on trusting people, helping and being helped by people and persuading people to do things. How can you achieve any of those things if you don't spend time getting to know each other?

When is this relationship-building supposed to happen? Outside of working hours? No, that's not right if we accept that relationship building is real work. When we're sitting at our computers or in our offices? No, that's when we might need to avoid interruptions and stay focused. So when, then? A lot of the best small talk happens accidentally: the classic situations are the queue for the photocopier, the coffee machine or the water cooler. But a much more systematic and effective way to build good relationships between people from different departments is to allow small talk to flourish in meetings.

Let's get a few things straight about meetings: the whole point of bringing people together for meetings is to generate discussion, to resolve misunderstandings, and to find solutions to problems that people couldn't find if they were working alone. If everything is carefully planned in advance, and the chair of the meeting sticks rigidly to the agenda, none of those things can take place. Of course, there's a time when it's appropriate for one person to talk and everyone else to listen and learn, but that's a presentation, not a meeting.

If you're serious about making your meetings more effective, you need to give the participants plenty of time to ask questions, take the conversation in new directions, say things which may or may not be relevant, and above all, get to know each other. Of course, you need to make sure things don't get out of control, but that means finding a sensible balance between small talk and getting down to business.

A company which does not tolerate small talk may get things done more quickly, but that doesn't mean it'll do things the best way, making full use of the skills and ideas of its employees ... and it may well find that it loses its best employees and its customers just as quickly.

Small talk phrases
1. Complete these small talk questions by choosing the best form for each verb in brackets.

Asking about current projects:

1. What ___ you ___ on at the moment?
2. How ___ it ___ (go) with your new assistant?
3. ___ you ___ (make) any progress with your big project?

Asking about recent events:

4. How ___ your presentation ___ (go) last week?
5. How ___ (be) your business trip? When ___ you ___ (get) back?

Asking about news:

6. What's new?
7. ___ you ___ (hear) back from that potential big customer yet?
8. What ___ you ___ (be) up to in your department?

Asking about plans and predictions

9. When do you think they ___ finally ___ (sign) the contract?
10. ___ you ___ (go) to the conference this weekend?

2. Now match the questions (1–10) above with the answers (a–j) below.

- a. A little, but it's very slow. We're still tied up with the financing side of things, so it doesn't feel like we're getting anywhere.
- b. Absolutely! I'm giving a presentation! I'm really nervous about it, actually.
- c. Ah, nothing, really. Nothing ever changes! Busy as usual.
- d. It was useful, but really exhausting. I just got back on Tuesday, so I'm still trying to get back on top of my inbox. But I'm glad I went. I made a few potentially useful contacts.
- e. Next week, hopefully, but they're still not happy with our service charges, so it might still all fall through.
- f. Not bad, actually. He's on a steep learning curve, but he's trying hard, and he's got a lot of potential.
- g. Really well. We had a good turn-out, and some people said nice things about it. Whether anyone actually buys the product as a result is another question!
- h. We're about to start working on the new marketing plan. It's not due to be launched for another two months, but it takes a really long time to get ready.
- i. We've been really busy preparing for next week's quality inspection. We're nearly ready, but there are still a few big jobs to finish.
- j. Yes, they emailed us this morning with an order for 500 units, so it looks like it's all going ahead. Very exciting.

Getting the meeting started

1. Look at this introduction to a meeting. What does the chairwoman mean by the phrases in bold?

1. Right ... I think we should start now. Robert, Alice ... could you ...? Robert ...? Thanks.
2. OK, so, is everybody here? Who are we waiting for? Hmm ... well, I think we'll have to **make a start without them**. We've got **a lot to get through** this afternoon.
3. Right, well, as you know, the purpose of today's meeting is to **see where we are** with the marketing plan, and to **work out what we still need to do** before the launch, which is now just six weeks away.
4. By the end of the meeting, we need to have a list of firm action points for the next month. Hopefully we'll then need only one more meeting next month to **tie up any remaining loose ends**.
5. Did everyone get a copy of the agenda I **sent round**? OK, good.
6. As I say, we've got a lot to get through, so please let's **stick to the agenda**. I've **set aside** two hours for this meeting, and we really can't afford to **run over**. Ideally, we can **cover everything** in an hour and a half. Does that sound reasonable?
7. Ah, Helena, come and take a seat. We started without you.
8. So perhaps we can **get the ball rolling** by **going through the list of action points** from the last meeting.
9. Borys, you were going to **look into** the costs of the various options that **came up** last time. Could you tell us what you **found out**?

2. Now match the nine steps in the meeting introduction (1–9) to the descriptions (a–i). Can you think of other phrases for the nine steps?

- a. Stating the desired outcome.
- b. Introducing the first point on the agenda.
- c. Getting people's attention, interrupting small talk
- d. Handing over to the first speaker.
- e. Dealing with non-attendees.
- f. Dealing with a late arrival.
- g. Explaining time limits and procedures.
- h. Stating the purpose
- i. Checking people have seen the agenda.

3. Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What body language do you think the chairwoman used to interrupt the small talk? Why didn't she finish her request?
2. Why do you think the chairwoman decided not to criticise people for being late? Do you agree with her decision?
3. The chairwoman referred to action points for the next month and a meeting next month. What's the difference between *the next month* and *next month*?
4. Why didn't the chairwoman go through the agenda step-by-step? Do you agree with her decision?
5. Why did the chairwoman set both a maximum time limit and an ideal time limit?
6. What verb form did the chairwoman use to refer to an action point from the last meeting?
7. Do you think the chairwoman's language was too idiomatic at times?

4. Without looking back at the chairwoman's introduction, match the beginnings and endings to make useful phrases for getting a meeting started.

1	to make
2	to have
3	to see
4	to tie
5	to send
6	to stick
7	to set
8	to run
9	to cover
10	to get
11	to go
12	to look
13	to come
14	to find

a.	aside X hours for sth
b.	the ball rolling by doing sth
c.	everything in X hours
d.	into sth
e.	a lot to get through
f.	over
g.	round a copy of the agenda
h.	a start without sb
i.	sth out
j.	through a list of action points
k.	to the agenda
l.	up (at the last meeting)
m.	up any remaining loose ends
n.	where we are with sth

5. Using the list of nine steps from task 2 above and the useful phrases from 4 above, take turns to practise starting your own meeting. You could use one of the topics below or your own ideas.

- A new Health and Safety Procedure
- How to deal with our recent Public Relations crisis
- Finding new sources of income for our business