

Meetings (2): Getting involved in meetings

Topic: Getting involved in meetings

Aims:

- To learn and practise some strategies to increase participation and co-operation in meetings in English;
- To raise awareness of common problems and strategies;
- To introduce and practice useful phrases for interrupting and clarifying;

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above

Introduction

Many learners of English worry about their mistakes and allow their insecurities to prevent them from participating in meetings fully. This lesson provides reassurance that such insecurities are very common and normal. It also presents some strategies for increasing their confidence and ability to participate actively in meetings in English. The lesson also warns students that they themselves are responsible for overcoming this barrier to communication. There is also some guidance for learners with the opposite problem: overconfidence and dominance. It is suitable for a wide range of professional contexts, not just businesspeople.

1. Lead-in

Elicit from the class whether students ever participate in meetings in English, and what problems they have with understanding and communicating. If students never participate in meetings in English, get them to predict what problems they would have in a high-level meeting in English.

2. Questionnaire: Meetings in English

Students work in pairs to discuss the questionnaire. Encourage them to guess unknown vocabulary, but you may need to help them with key vocabulary (*brainstorming, to interrupt, to express sth, to involve sb*). Make sure students realise that their discussion should include real-life examples where possible. Afterwards, elicit some real-life examples from the class, and help with vocabulary problems.

3. Analysis

Students read and discuss the analysis in pairs, and try to complete the advice. Afterwards, elicit and discuss some advice from the class and write it on the board.

Suggested answers

See next exercise.

4. Strategies

Students complete the exercise in pairs. Discuss with the class whether each piece of advice is sensible or practical, and which advice they will follow. Ideally,

you would also follow this up in a later lesson: which advice did they follow, and how effective was it?

Answers

- Perfectionist: b, c, f, h
- Risk-taker: a, d, e, g
- All the advice is intended to be sensible and practical. Of course, it will depend on how much time students have, and how serious they are about improving.

5. Useful language

Print out the worksheets so that each student has a copy, and there is also one extra copy for every group of around three students. Cut these extra copies along the dotted lines and give each group a pack of slips of paper. They then work in their groups to match the 26 useful phrases to the five functions. When you check with the class, elicit more examples of useful phrases for these functions. As a follow-up, students could test each other by reading the name of a function to elicit as many phrases as possible from their partners.

Answers

- Allowing others to continue: a, h, p, u
- Checking you've understood / specifying the problem: c, k, m, n, o, r, s, t, x, z
- Interrupting: b, e, f, q
- Inviting others to get involved: g, v, w, y
- Preventing an interruption: d, i, j, l

6. Practice

Students work in groups of around four or five. Give one student the Student A slip and a second student the Student B slip. Students A and B then take turns to make the announcement on their slips of paper, inventing any additional details in order to make the announcement longer. The other students should interrupt the speakers in order to clarify the meaning of any words and phrases they do not understand. Note that the phrases in bold are intended to be difficult or impossible to understand, and are therefore explained at the bottom. Of course, the listeners have no way of knowing which phrases are in bold and which are not, so they will have to be brave and ask about everything they are unsure of. At the end, discuss with the class whether the listeners managed to ask about all the phrases in bold.

As a follow-up, you could repeat the activity where one student explains something technical from his/her own area of expertise (e.g. a hobby or a complicated procedure). The listeners have to interrupt regularly to ask for clarification.

7. Role-plays

Students use the strategies from this lesson, plus their own strategies, to role-play the two situations in groups of four or five. Ideally, students should work in mixed groups (i.e. perfectionists with risk-takers).

In the first role-play, tell the risk-takers to try to dominate the meeting. This will force the perfectionists to interrupt, using the strategies from the lesson. Set a time limit of around 5–10 minutes. Afterwards, give and elicit feedback on their success at interrupting.

In the second role-play, tell students to aim for all participants to contribute equally. Again, set a time limit of 5–10 minutes and then give and elicit feedback.

Monitor carefully during the meetings, focusing especially on whether everybody contributed equally.