

Lesson 02: Business Meetings

Business meetings are essential for team working and getting things done in the organizations. A business meeting is a gathering of two people or more for the purpose of discussing business matters and making decisions related to these matters in the company. Business meetings are generally conducted face to face in an office. However, with the rise of video-conferencing technologies, participants can join a meeting from anywhere. In this lesson students will learn the basic vocabulary related to business meetings, and they will identify and understand the different processes or steps in holding a meeting.



A. Preparing for the meeting

There are many things to prepare when managing a meeting. These include:

1. Arranging the documents involved in the meeting: **the minutes** of the previous meeting, a meeting **agenda**, sending a **memo** to **the committee members**, and **the attendance list**.
2. Setting up the meeting room, and providing all the necessary equipment (computers, white board, overhead projector, video recorder, microphone,...etc).

In general, **the Secretary** is the person who is responsible for doing the tasks mentioned above **The Chairperson** (the executive of the company) is responsible for chairing and leading the meeting.

Example:

Executive: the Sales Department meeting is scheduled for this Tuesday morning. Have you sent a memo to everyone on the committee?

Secretary: Yes, sir. I have.

Executive: And have you typed up the agenda?

Secretary: No. I haven't done that yet. I will take care of that as soon as possible. Do you need me to take the minutes again?

Executive: Yes. And I also need you to check the meeting room on Monday and make sure all the equipment is ready.

Secretary: Ok. I will take care of that as well.

Executive: great!

Key terms

Minutes: the written records of main points of discussions at a formal meeting (they're called '**notes**' in informal meetings).

Agenda: a list of items or topics discussed by the participants during the meeting.

Memo (abbreviation of: **Memorandum**): a short written report used for internal communication within an organization.

Committee members: a group of people chosen to take on the responsibility of managing specific issues and making decisions as a collective group within an organization.

Attendance list: a document that serves to keep a record of the people who will attend the meeting (attendees).

Secretary: the person whose work contains of supporting management and doing office work, including arranging the meetings.

Chairperson (Chairman / Chair): the person who is in charge of a meeting, a committee, or an event.

Word combinations with 'meeting'

Arrange / Set up / Fix: organize a meeting.

Bring forward: make a meeting earlier than originally decided.

Put back / postpone: make a meeting later than originally planned.

Cancel: not have a meeting after all.

Manage / Run / Chair: be in charge of a meeting.

Attend: go to a meeting.

Miss: not go to a meeting

Adjourn: have a pause (break) or rest during a meeting.

B. Chairing a meeting

There are many steps that must be followed by the chairperson to ensure running an effective and successful meeting.

B.1. Welcoming attendees and starting the meeting

Before the meeting starts, the chairperson should have to make sure that everyone is paying attention. They could say:

Could I have your attention, please?

After having everyone's attention, it's time to welcome and thank the attendees before getting things started.

Thank you all for coming and welcome to today's meeting. Let's begin. / Shall we make a start?

If the meeting is being held for the first time, making introductions becomes necessary especially when new participants attend the meeting. (sharing names and job titles).

Good morning / Hello, my name is .../ I'd like to introduce.../ This is ..., and he/she is....

B.2. Introducing the topic and outlining the agenda

After welcoming the attendees and opening the meeting, the chairperson starts introducing the overall topic, then the agenda of the meeting. They could use some of these expressions:

Today's meeting is about... / I've called this meeting to discuss...

The objective of this meeting is to... / I've arranged this meeting to...

After that, the chair of the meeting starts outlining the items of the agenda. They could say:

We have many items on the agenda, the first is about... the second about is...

Let's move on to the next item. Now, we come to the... / The final item on the agenda is...

Example: Ali Haroun, Chief Executive of a company, is opening a meeting. He says: "good morning and thank you all for coming. As you know, I've called this meeting to discuss how to reduce costs in the IT department. We have three items on the agenda. The first one is about IT department running cost. The second is about proposals for reducing costs. And the last one is about staff cuts.

The chair should make sure each point on the agenda is allocated the time it deserves and should keep to the timetable. When the time allocated to one point is up, the chair should make sure that discussion moves on to the next point, even if the issue has not been completely covered or resolved (decided).

B. 3. Inviting attendees to participate

One of the chair's responsibilities is making sure attendees get a chance to express their ideas and take part in discussions.

Would you like to open the discussion? / What is your opinion on this? / What do you think about this? / What are your views (feelings or thoughts) on this? / Could you add anything to this idea?

The chair should make sure that each participant has the chance to make their point, and should deal tactfully with disagreements, making sure that each side feels their point of view has been noted.

B. 4. Dealing with distractions and staying on topic

The chairman needs to keep people focused on the agenda and avoid distractions (digressions), where people get off the point. They could use some of the following expressions:

Let's not get too far off the topic here. / we can discuss that at the end, if you feel it's important. I don't think that's relevant to today's discussion. / let's table it (shelve it) until the next meeting.

B. 5. Summarizing and concluding the meeting

Once all the participants have finished discussing everything, the chair needs to summarize the key points from the agenda and to ensure the meeting finishes on time. They could say:

Before we close, let me just summarize the main points. / To sum up. / If there are no further issues to discuss, I'd like to finish with a quick summary and highlight the key points. / Right, that's all for today's meeting. Thank you all for coming.

After some meetings, it's necessary for the minutes to be circulated, especially if there are action points that particular people are responsible for. At the next meeting, the chair should ask for the minutes to be read out and see if all agree that it is an accurate record of what happened, and see if there are any matters arising (any points from the last meeting that need to be discussed). And they should check what progress has been made on the action points from the previous meeting.

C. Participating in a meeting

In a meeting, the participants discuss things. In the discussion, some people may agree with someone else. Others may disagree. They may have differences of opinion with somebody. They may ask questions, interrupt politely, and make suggestions.

C. 1. Agreeing and disagreeing

- **Agreeing:** when people agree about something, the following expressions are often used.

I (totally) agree with... / You're perfectly right. / You may be right there. / That sounds good.
I couldn't agree more. / let's go with this idea. / that's true. / Absolutely. / Exactly. ...etc.

Example: You may be right there. We're already ten per cent over budget.

- **Disagreeing:** when people disagree about something, the following expressions are frequent.

I don't really agree. / I'm sorry, but that's out of the question. / I think you're wrong. / To be honest, I'm not sure about this idea. / I take your point but... / I'm afraid I can't agree with you there. ...etc.

Example: I think you're wrong. The design department's costs are justified because of our high quality work.

(**Hedging** is when you avoid disagreeing directly. **Example:** I understand what you're saying about the needs of each department, but each department must be treated in an appropriate way.)

C. 2. Expressing opinions

The participants in a meeting could use some of the following expressions to express their opinions:

In my opinion,... / From my point of view (perspective),... / To my mind... / I think (believe)...
The way I see it... / As I see it,... / I look at it like this...etc.

Example: In my opinion, in order to meet budget this year, we will have to start some cost-saving measures.

C. 3. Making suggestions

When the participants want to make suggestions. They use some of these expressions:

I suggest / propose/recommend ... / I have a suggestion. / We ought to... / We might...
We have to... / We need (don't need) / I think we should (not)... etc.

Example: We have to improve the way we collect and record sales data. / **We don't need to** hire new staff at the moment.

C. 4. Asking questions and interrupting

- To ask questions in a meeting, the participant could use some of these expressions:

I have a question ... / Does this mean...? / Can you clarify/explain...?
Why is...? / How...? / What...? etc.

Example: What is your suggestion to solve this problem?

- To interrupt someone politely, the participant could say:

Sorry to interrupt you but, ... / if I can just stop you for a moment... / Can I come in here?
Can I share an idea? / I'd like to add something here. / Do you mind if I jump in here? ...etc.

Example: Sorry to interrupt you, but I didn't understand. Would you mind clarifying this point?

➤ Language review:

- **Capitalization:** the first word in a sentence / proper nouns / pronoun I / names of cities, states, countries / names of days and months / names of national, religious and local holidays / titles used with names / the first word in the greeting or closing of a letter / the main words in the title of a book, magazine, newspaper, movie... / names of organizations, associations, or teams and their members / the names of businesses and the official names of their products / initials and abbreviations...

- **Punctuation:** period (.) / comma (,) / colon (:) / semicolons (;) / hyphen (-) / dash (--) / apostrophe (') / ellipsis (...) / parentheses/brackets () / quotation marks ("") / question mark (?) / exclamation point (!).

Exercise 1: Replace the underlined expressions with appropriate forms of the verbs from the box below? In some cases, more than one verb is possible.

A meeting of the Tennis Club Committee was organized for 1 October, but not everyone could go to it, so it was delayed until October 31. One committee member said that this was too late, so eventually we moved it to October 15. The chairperson was in charge of it very efficiently, and we decided on some new membership rules. Only one committee member did not go to the meeting.

put back	chaired	missed	set up	ran
postponed	arranged	attend	brought it forward	

Exercise 2: Write each expression in the right column of the table below?

Agreeing	Disagreeing	Expressing opinion	Making suggestion

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. In my opinion, that will be very difficult. | 5. I think we should make this a priority. |
| 2. We need to find another solution. | 6. As I see it. We can't do this. |
| 3. let's go with this idea. | 7. I'm not sure about this idea. |
| 4. That's not exactly how I see it. | 8. That sounds perfect. |

Exercise 3: Put the following statements (related to the main tips of running a meeting) in the correct order?

- Redirect participants when they go off-topic.
- Summarize the key points and end the meeting on time.
- Type up the minutes of the meeting and distribute them to the attendees.
- Start the meeting (welcoming attendees, introducing the topic and outlining the agenda).
- Prepare the documents (previous minutes, agenda, memo) and set up the meeting room.
-Send out the agenda to the participants and consider who needs to be invited to the meeting.
- Go through the items of the agenda.

Exercise 4: Look at the word square. Find seven words which match the given definitions?

1. A written report of what was discussed in a meeting.
2. People who attend a meeting.
3. List of items to discuss in a meeting.
4. The person who runs a meeting.
5. To have a break in a meeting
6. Delay the date of a meeting to a later time.
7. The person who does office work, including arranging meetings.

P	A	R	T	I	C	I	P	A	N	T	S
F	G	I	O	I	H	P	H	S	V	N	O
A	E	M	J	C	A	Y	S	E	D	N	M
N	N	O	A	Z	I	B	E	C	E	O	I
D	D	C	N	P	R	A	S	R	D	N	M
E	A	K	C	O	B	J	E	E	H	I	N
K	A	B	M	S	O	P	C	T	Y	X	Q
D	A	B	C	T	H	H	O	A	L	T	U
R	D	B	N	P	L	K	P	R	O	O	I
I	A	D	J	O	U	R	N	Y	D	J	S
G	D	M	I	N	U	T	E	S	Z	M	T
T	U	N	B	E	A	R	T	S	A	P	P

Homework: What do you think are the most important skills for someone chairing a meeting?