



Business Englisch mit Business-Profis
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8 steps to moderating meetings effectively

- in English
- in person
- online

**bec2 Business English Communication
Coaching**



8 steps to moderating meetings effectively – in English, in person, or online

This cheat sheet is perfect for you, if you suffer from the following symptoms when you hear the words, “business meeting in English”:

1. You get nervous and start to sweat, every time you are told you have a meeting, conference call or online session in English.
2. You hate the thought of team meetings with native English speakers and can't sleep the night before
3. You get frustrated when you cannot express yourself the way you want to, so you just stay quiet. You have the feeling people do not take you seriously.
5. You think you are at a disadvantage when trying to get your ideas accepted.

Relax. Here are 8 steps that will help you gain more confidence when meeting in English:

Introduction - specifically for online meetings

Step 1: Learn the art of small talk

Step 2: Know the steps of an effective meeting

Step 3: Understand the art of sequencing language & relevance

Step 4: Learn how to ask clarifying questions

Step 5: Learn the key language for giving an opinion

Step 6: Know how to agree & disagree politely, and interrupt courteously

Step 7: Be sure to summarize

Step 8: Sign off politely and on a high note

Introduction – specifically for online meetings

Let's start with specifics for online meetings. Many of the 8 points that follow apply to all meetings, so let's get the details for online meetings out of the way now.

Online meetings mean that we now must manage not only the tasks associated with the meeting, but also the technology used to enable the meeting and most importantly, the relationships we must create and nurture online.

General tips for online meetings

- Decide who **needs** to be in the meeting, just as you would with an in-person meeting.
- Invite the participants to the meeting via your technology, providing all information they need in order to join.
- For a first meeting, ask everyone to log on 15 minutes before the start time, to work out any kinks with the technology beforehand.
- Break the ice with a little small talk, as you would in a face-to-face meeting. Progress to 'water cooler' talk – that info that you usually find out hanging around the office coffee area when you're physically in the office.
- Ask questions frequently both to engage everyone and to keep a personal connection going. However, be explicit in your questions. Ask a specific person a specific question. Asking open-ended questions to a large remote audience will often result in "dead air" and then multiple people talking at once.
- Keep the focus on one or two topics. If you must cover more items, then give people time to stretch, take a bathroom break, or replenish their coffee. Keep each segment of the meeting short - no longer than 30 minutes.

Pro Tip: Striped shirts do not transmit well on camera nor does large, shiny jewelry. Both can be visually distracting. Try to keep your body movements to a minimum as excessive movement can degrade video quality.

Online Etiquette

The key to a successful online session is to remember that you are in a meeting. Give your full attention to the others in your group as you would if you were in the same room. Don't be distracted by e-mail, Web surfing, or texting. Try not to eat or drink so that you can be prepared if questions are directed to you. Always assume when you walk into the room that the microphones are already live to other locations!

Online meetings should move at a slightly slower pace than a typical meeting due to a two to three second delay for most systems to communicate. If you're leading the meeting, make sure there are long enough pauses after asking a question.

If you are a participant, attract attention to yourself before addressing the group by signalling with your hand or saying "question" or "comment" and then waiting a couple seconds before continuing. Participants should also make eye contact by looking into the camera. It will make conversation among the participants more natural. The following is a quick cheat sheet on etiquette:

The 8 **Do's** of Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Do be courteous to other participants**
- Do speak clearly**
- Do keep body movements minimal**
- Do move and gesture slowly and naturally**
- Do maintain eye contact by looking into the camera**
- Do dress appropriately**
- Do make the session animated**
- Do be yourself and have fun!**

The 7 **Don'ts** of Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Don't make distracting sounds**
- Don't shout**
- Don't make distracting movements**
- Don't interrupt others, unless necessary & you can do it politely**
- Don't carry on side conversations**
- Don't cover the microphone**

Now, tips for all types of meetings.....

1. Learn the art of small talk.

The best way to generate conversation is to ask questions. So, what type of questions are appropriate?

Easy openers: These types of questions are easy to use and start the ball rolling. They are totally inoffensive and questions that everyone can answer easily:

- How are you?
- How are you today?
- How's it going?
- How have you been?
- How are things?
- What's keeping you busy these days (my personal favourite!)

Open statements: These are great and can be tailored to suit your needs. They easily put ideas on the table for people to react to. Let's consider the following scenario:

If you say, *"I hear there is an IoT world conference on next week"*

And the person says, *"Oh, really, I didn't know"*

then this gives you the opportunity to add some additional information that you had prepared previously.

It's also a great way to setup a conversation on a topic that you know something about. Obviously, it is highly effective when you have prepared information on a number of topics prior to the meeting.

**I hear the Salzburg Festival is on.
I hear the Danube Festival starts on Friday.
It's amazing what happened in Innsbruck this week/ last week...**

Closed questions: These are simple to form. However, they are not the best when trying to generate conversation. Why you might ask? Well, because they can be answered with a simple yes or no response. **Closed questions are formed using auxiliary (helping) verbs at the beginning.**

**Have you been to the Salzburg Festival before?
Did you have a good summer break?
Did you have a good flight/journey?
Did you enjoy your lunch?
Have you been to Salzburg before?
Did you hear about Electric Love last year?
Are you watching the Olympics/World Cup?**

Open questions: These are great for generating discussion because they cannot be answered with simple yes/no responses. Open questions are also sometimes called WH questions. This is because they use interrogative pronouns such as, what, which, when, where, why and how.

- How was the weekend?
- When did you arrive in (insert name of town/city/country)?
- Which hotel are you staying at in the city?
- Where are you from originally?
- What do you think of (insert name of town/city/country)?

Tag questions: These types of questions make it easy for someone to answer you. Plus, you can elicit the type of answer that you desire. So how do they work?

Positive Statement	Negative Tag	Type of response
This is your first time in Salzburg,	isn't it?	Generally positive
You take milk in your coffee,	don't you?	

Negative Statement	Positive Tag	Type of response
You haven't been to Munich before,	have you?	Generally positive
You're not from Austria,	are you?	

That was simple, wasn't it? It's important to understand that we invert the axillary verb. So, the verb "to be" becomes "isn't/aren't", and general verbs in the present simple use the auxiliary "don't/doesn't. There are many combinations for all tenses, but here we are just covering the basics.

Pro-tip:

If you want to generate small talk and really engage someone, you need to learn the art of storytelling. You are trying to ultimately build a rapport with the person and make the meeting with them more successful.

So, how do you effectively engage people with stories? Well, first you should set the stage, give some background information. This will help you to create the right mood for the situation. You may want to be funny, or you may want to be serious, or you may want to look professional. Setting the mood is an important first step. You could say things like:

Something funny happened the other day...	Funny story
You won't believe what I saw the other day...	Serious story
An amazing this happened at work the other day...	Professional story

Next, you need to have the context of a story, or the body. What will you base your story on? Well, as you can see from the examples above, the best stories are ones based on your personal experience. Furthermore, if you want to come across as a genuine person, then you should always try and share something interesting and not talk about how amazing you are. To sound humble, you could also talk about your shortcomings, or have a laugh at yourself for something silly you have done. So, what can you say?

Do you have any kids/pets? Oh, me too. You won't believe what one of my kids/my dog did the other day. We were at the table, having dinner when.....

So, as you can see, you have asked a simple closed question, to elicit engagement from the other person. Then you've made the connection between both of you having kids or pets. Then you set the mood by starting the story with the expression "you won't believe" (this instantly generates curiosity). From here you go on to explain something personal about your kids that is funny.

With stories, we can 'tick a lot of boxes'. You've not only started a conversation, you have engaged the other person, shared personal information and made them see that you are a real person with a real family and not a cold businessperson only there to make a deal. To better engage someone, you could also work on body language, gestures and voice intonation. By doing this you can really keep someone's attention on us.

Finally, you can use the story as a queue to generate interest from the other person. Once you have shared a short story, you can lead on with some questions. For example, if you look at the previous example, you could ask the other person *if their kids or pets do crazy/funny things*. It is vitally important that you think of things that happen to all people. I mean, whose kids and/or pets don't do crazy/funny things? This way it makes it easy for the other person to share an experience with you. This is how you build genuine rapport with someone you barely know.

To summarise, in order to create meaningful small talk, you need to ask the right questions and engage people with short stories on topics that everyone is familiar with.

2. Know the steps of an effective meeting

If you understand the typical steps of an effective meeting, then you are able to participate better at each step of the way, right? It makes sense, doesn't it?

By understanding which stage of the meeting you are at, you can better predict the type of language functions and expressions that need to be used.

For example, you wouldn't typically use expressions for agreeing & disagreeing when you open a meeting. There are typical expressions you use when opening a meeting, such as, *"If we are all here..." "I'd like to get started/start the meeting"* or *"It's a pleasure to welcome Jim Barney"*.

So, what are the steps? As with most things, such as emails, stories, reports etc. there is an introduction, body & conclusion.

Open the meeting:

- Greet everybody and greet the participants.
- Allocate roles.
- Give the purpose of the meeting.
- Go through the agenda (if there is no agenda quickly discuss creating one.).
- Review the Minutes (notes) of the last meeting (if relevant).

Main body:

- Address the points in the agenda.
- Make decisions and decide on the desired outcome of each decision.
- Clarify and check all decisions made.
- Summarize and restate the main points discussed.

Closing the meeting:

- Summarize the meeting and decisions made.
- Clarify any points that are unclear for any participant.
- Assign tasks to participants based on the decisions made.
- Set dates for the completion of tasks or dates for task update reports.
- If necessary, set a date for the follow up meeting.
- End the meeting on a polite, upbeat (positive) note.

Now that you know the 3 main parts of meeting, let's focus on the key language required for each part. Moving on to step 3....

3. Understand the art of sequencing language & relevance

By learning sequencing and using correct linking expressions, you can sound more precise and relevant. Remember, you must keep your contributions to a meeting concise and short. Get straight to the point. Don't use fancy language and always try to avoid acronyms, short forms or industry jargon that others might not understand.

So why is sequencing so important? Well, the answer is straightforward. Firstly, you can signal to other people in the meeting how many points you wish to cover. For example, by saying "I just want to add two points to what you said earlier, firstly... blah blah and secondly... blah blah", you achieve two things.

First, you prevent interruptions, because people know you have two things to say. Secondly, you clarify and link together two ideas. This makes you more relevant and helps to stay on track. Below you have some common sequencing language:

Sequencing vocabulary

Beginning:	Examples:
Firstly, First of all, To start off with Initially, In the first place,	Firstly, I began my education in London. First of all, I think we should consider..., To start off with, we have decided that Marta will be responsible for this. Initially, I thought it was a bad idea, ... In the first place, there is the schedule to consider...
Continuing:	Examples:
Then, After that, Next, Secondly, In the second place,	In the second place, don't you all agree that... After that, I think we should... Next, we need to decide on our strategy. Secondly, we should consider... In the second place, don't you all agree that...
Ending:	Examples
Finally, Lastly,	Finally, I feel we need to... Lastly, it is my view that we should postpone the project.

So, in conclusion, you need to start using sequencing language to achieve two main goals. Firstly, to help you organize your ideas and then deliver them in a concise way and secondly, to prevent other people from interrupting you during your contribution.

4. Learn how to ask clarifying questions

I am often asked, what clarifying questions are. Well, they are an essential tool for many aspects of business - to both native and non-native speakers of English. Non-native English speakers are often taught to ask the speaker to repeat what they said, when they don't understand. For example, "Sorry, could you repeat that" or "Sorry, what did you say". This approach is not very effective. If you didn't understand the first time, then you probably won't the second time. Here are some guidelines.

Guidelines for clarifying

- Admit if you are unsure about what the speaker means.
- State what the speaker has said as you understand it, and check whether this is what they really said.
- Ask for specific examples.
- Use open, non-directive questions - if appropriate.
- Ask if you have got it right and be prepared to be corrected. For example, "If I understood you correctly....."

Instead of asking the speaker to repeat what they said, use the parts of the sentence that you **did** understand, to create a clarifying question. Let's look at an example.

Initial Statement	Correct clarifying question	Not the best response
I would like to postpone the meeting to the 5 th of July	Sorry, did you say the 5 th of July or the fifteenth of July?	Sorry, could you repeat that date again?

By taking this approach you gain control of the conversation. Clarifying questions help you become more confident. You are the person asking the questions and not embarrassing yourself by continually asking for repetition.

So, here are some more examples of clarifying questions.

- How/what do you mean exactly?
- What does this point mean exactly?
- Can you just clarify your last point?
- Could you be more specific on this point?
- How would this work in practice?
- What does (insert idea) refer to?

In summary then, clarifying questions make you sound more confident, give you control over the flow of the meeting and helps you understand the points that you may have misunderstood. Let's take a look at our next step.

5. Learn the key language for giving an opinion

The key to expressing an opinion is similar to a mini essay. First, you state your opinion, then you elaborate with one, two or three examples and next, you signal to the listener that you have finished the point by stating a mini-conclusion that completes the idea. Additionally, you should use words that help you to structure and sequence your ideas. Look at the example below.

Opinion: From my point of view, the proposal being suggested has some problems with it.

1. **Example 1:** Firstly, it is expensive when compared to the market
2. **Example 2:** Secondly, it doesn't meet the companies' needs as set out in the business case
3. **Example 3:** And finally, we have no guarantees about its effectiveness in the long run.
4. **Conclusion:** Therefore, in my opinion, we cannot accept it.

As you can see, the opinion of the speaker is very clear, and these examples help demonstrate the point as well as using sequencing language to clarify his/her opinion. Finally, this style is effective for relevance and for preventing interruptions. Take a look at some of these expressions below:

Giving opinion vocabulary	Examples:
In my opinion... From my point of view... I believe... I feel..... My position is...	In my opinion, we should negotiate. From my point of view, we need to look at other alternatives. I believe we can close the deal. I feel this plan has some problems with it. My position is the following...

6. Know how to agree & disagree politely, and interrupt courteously

Here we are going to look at agreeing and disagreeing politely. Agreeing is easy, right? Disagreeing can be difficult, however. What are the secrets? First, acknowledge people and their ideas even if you don't agree with them. Secondly, provide supporting arguments. This helps give your disagreement substance.

Structure		Supporting Argument
Agreement	I completely agree with what you just said	n/a
Disagreement	I'm sorry, but that isn't accurate.	In fact, that invoice was paid last month

Adjacency training:

Sometimes agreeing and disagreeing can be as simple as, "Me too", "Neither do I", "I do" or "I don't". Saying the correct adjacency response quickly and naturally is an important skill when participating in many business situations.

Structure:			
Note: An auxiliary verb is a helping verb, such as do or forms of to be (am, are, is, was, were) and modal verbs include could, would, should, ought, might, may etc.			
To agree with a positive statement	Use so + auxiliary/modal verb + pronoun	I like tea with sugar	So do I
To agree with a negative statement	Use nor/neither + auxiliary/modal verb + pronoun	I don't like tea with sugar	Nor do I. Neither do I.
To DISagree with a positive statement	Use pronoun + auxiliary/modal verb	I like tea without sugar	I don't!
To DISagree with a negative statement	Use pronoun + auxiliary/modal verb	I don't like tea with sugar	I do!

Let's take a look at some common expressions for **dis**agreeing politely.

Expression	Trigger	In use
I'm afraid I disagree	We need to buy at least 10 new machines	I'm afraid I disagree.
I beg to differ	Books are a thing of the past. The future is all online.	I beg to differ. Many people still prefer the feel of a book in their hands.
I see why you might think that	Globalization is just one more way rich countries exploit the poor countries.	I see why you might think that. However, I think most relationships are mutually beneficial.
I'm sorry. I disagree	I think we should stop here.	I'm sorry. I disagree. I could type forever!

Just as it's important to be polite when disagreeing, it's also key to be courteous when you need to interrupt a speaker. Some suggestions for doing that:

**I'm sorry, could I just interrupt you here?
 Perhaps I could just interrupt.
 I'm going to have to stop you there for a moment.
 Excuse me. Could I jump in here for a second?
 Sorry? / Pardon?
 Thank you for allowing me to interrupt you. Please continue.**

So, in conclusion, being polite is much better than being angry. Always show the other person that you understand their opinion, even if you don't agree, by always using a supporting argument.

If you feel that it is important to interrupt the speaker, do so as diplomatically and courteously as possible.

7. Be sure to summarize

OK! This is almost the last step on how to gain more confidence in your business meetings in English. Summarizing is critically important, as it is how you make sure all the things agreed upon are correct and everyone knows who will do what before the next meeting.

Have a look at these typical expressions:

Before we close today's meeting, let me just summarize the main points.
Let me quickly go over today's main points.
To sum up,
OK, why don't we quickly summarize what we've done today.
In brief,
Shall I go over the main points?
Would you call me once you've...?
Talking about the next contact...
I'll call you next week.

8. Finish the meeting on a polite and positive note

Just as all emails and phone calls should end politely, so should meetings, whether they are in person or online. Find something – anything! – positive to finish up with. People may not remember what you said in the meeting. However, they will remember how you made them feel. So, send them back to work with an upbeat feeling whenever possible.

We made great progress today!
Good job everyone!
Let me quickly go over today's main points.
Thanks. / Thank you
I want to thank you for your time and your input
It's been nice talking to you.
Take care until we meet again.

To Wrap Up.....

This is meant to be quick information (a review for some of you and new material for others) and a reference document. We hope you've found it helpful. We'd love to hear from you! Please contact our office at doris.hoefberger@bec2.at if we can help in any way.