

Business communication skills

Meetings | Updating and delegating tasks



1 07▷ Jamie Ortega oversees several volunteer projects in the Chicago area. He is calling Samira Khan to ask about the progress of the community centre project she is working on. Listen to their conversation and makes notes on Jamie's notepad.

TO DO:

Call Samira Khan (community centre)

Check re:

- deadline - can they meet it?

- decorating?

- lighting?

- carpets?

- action?

2 07▷ Listen again and complete these phrases.

1 How _____ over there?

2 Well, so far _____.

3 Everything's _____.

4 So what's _____ the decorating?

5 We're _____ the ceiling ...

6 And where _____ the lighting?

7 We've _____ ...

8 So, _____, the painting's nearly done, ...

9 So it's all going according _____.

3 Put the phrases from **2** into these categories.

a Asking for an update: _____

b Giving an update: _____

c Summarizing: _____

4 Work with a partner. Look at this schedule for an office move. Ask and answer questions about the project using phrases from **2**.

Example: A What's happening with the headed stationery?

B We've ordered it.

Office move progress update 11/05

Task	Deadline	Date finished
Order headed stationery	10/05	09/05
Order new furniture	10/05	10/05
Send new address cards to clients	11/05	To do
Issue staff with new badges	11/05	10/05
Pack up paperwork	15/05	ongoing

Tip | Dates

Dates are written differently in the US and the UK. In British English the day comes before the month. In American English the month comes before the day.

the tenth of May = 10/05 (British English); 05/10 (American English)

5 08▷ Listen to this meeting between Samira, Jamie, and team members, Josie and Bruno. Who agrees to

1 meet the carpet suppliers? _____

2 buy the paint? _____

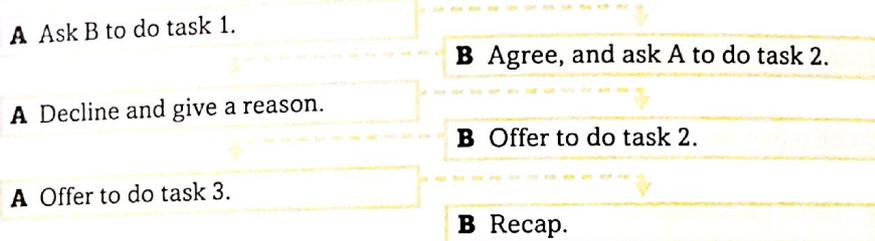
3 paint the ceiling? _____

6 08▷ Listen again. Mark 1–10: *A* (allocating a task), *O* (offering / agreeing to do a task), *D* (declining to do a task), or *S* (summarizing).

- 1 We need somebody to be here then to open up. _____
- 2 Can you do it? _____
- 3 Leave it with me. _____
- 4 I can go there this afternoon if you want. _____
- 5 Why don't I go there now? _____
- 6 I'd prefer not to if that's OK. _____
- 7 I'll come with you, then. _____
- 8 You can carry on with the rest of this paint. _____
- 9 I'm sorry, I have an appointment. _____
- 10 So, you two are going to get the paint ... _____

» For more exercises, go to Practice file 2 on page 104.

7 Work with a partner. Some students are visiting your company and you need to: book a room for the talk (task 1), get name badges (task 2), organize refreshments (task 3). Have a conversation using this flow chart.



8 Work with a partner. Two project update meetings took place yesterday. Student A, turn to File 03 on page 136. Student B, use the information below.

Student B: You went to the Project 2 meeting. Your partner went to the Project 1 meeting. Your partner will call you. Tell him / her about Project 2, then find out what is happening with Project 1. These are the things you need to know.

Project 1 - organizing a training day for staff

- Venue for training session?
- Hotel for trainers?
- Lunch?
- Information pack for trainees?
- Other?

Project 2 - raising money for a local children's charity

- Posters and leaflets - printing now
- 10 km sponsored run - need to contact council about using municipal ground
- Charity sale - all staff have received a memo
- Need someone to organize collection boxes

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Key expressions

Asking for an update

How are things going?
What's happening with ...?
Where are we with ...?

Giving an update

So far so good.
Everything's on track.
We're (+ -ing) ...
We've finished / completed ..., etc.

Allocating a task

Can you ...?
You can ...
I / We need somebody / you to ...

Offering to do something

Why don't I ...?
I'll ...
I can ... if you want.
Leave it with me.

Declining to do something

I'm sorry, I can't.
I'm afraid I'm busy.
I'd prefer not to (if that's OK).

Summarizing

So, to recap ...
X is / am / are going to ...
It's all going according to plan.

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Practically speaking | How to start and end phone calls

1 Complete phrases a–f below. Which ones can you use to

1 start a call? _____

2 end a call? _____

a I'm returning your _____.

c _____'s (name) here.

e What can I _____ for you?

b Thanks _____ your help.

d _____ for calling.

f I'm _____ about / for / to ...

2 Work with a partner. Have three phone calls using phrases from 1.

- You want to know the time of a meeting tomorrow.
- You want an expenses authorization form.
- You are calling someone back with information about your holiday dates.

Meetings | Presenting and discussing plans



- 1** Merging companies or departments can be difficult. Work in small groups and talk about the problems that might happen in the following areas.
- 1 personal relationships and teamwork
 - 2 working space
 - 3 old and new hierarchies
 - 4 ways of doing things
- 2** 34▷ Quoteus Insurance is merging with Buckler Insurance Services. Quoteus managers, Carmen and Nikos, are meeting with Erica and Dieter, their counterparts from Buckler. They are discussing how to overcome feelings of suspicion between staff. Listen and make notes on Erica's notepad.

Nikos's plan: _____

How it will work: _____

Timescale of the plan: _____

What he needs before he can launch it: _____

- 3** What other way of breaking down barriers do they discuss?

- 4** 34▷ Listen again and complete these phrases.

- 1 We _____ to be ready on schedule.
- 2 Where does this _____ us?
- 3 _____ the next few weeks ...
- 4 ... I _____ to hold a series of small meetings.
- 5 How long will it _____ to involve all the staff?
- 6 I _____ to have seven or eight sessions.
- 7 What's the _____ on this?
- 8 _____ the end of next month.
- 9 What's the next _____?
- 10 It is _____ that ...
- 11 ... there'll be a few problems in the short _____
- 12 But the _____ are ...
- 13 ... there won't be too many personality clashes in the _____ run.

Tip | likely and pretty

These adjectives can mean something different from what you might immediately think. *Likely* can mean *probable*.
Share prices are likely to go down after this disaster.
Pretty can mean *reasonably*.
I'm pretty sure that won't happen.

5 Put the phrases from 4 into these categories.

- a Talking about a future hope, a plan, or expectations: _____
- b Asking and talking about time needed: _____
- c Asking and talking about an action needed: _____

» For more exercises, go to **Practice file 8** on page 116.

6 Work with a partner. Continue the meeting from 2. There are two other important topics on the agenda – organization of office space and creation of the new departmental organigram. Student A, turn to File 19 on page 139. Student B, use the information below. Read your information before you start.

Student B

You are creating the new departmental organigram (diagram which shows the hierarchy of the department).

This is a very sensitive subject because of the status of different job titles in different companies.

Your plans are to

- conduct individual interviews with key staff
- prepare a draft document for discussion.

By the end of the month: have small working parties

In six weeks' time: have proposal for both Quoteus and Buckler

In two months' time: make decision and inform staff

- 1 Your partner will describe his / her plans for the project he / she is working on.
- 2 Tell your partner what you are working on, how you expect it to go, and describe your plans.

7 Think about the next twelve months at work. Look in your diaries if you want. Make short notes about your immediate plans and your long-term plans. Tell the class.

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Key expressions

Describing plans and intentions
We're also going to ...
X is going to ...

Expressing future hopes and expectations

We expect to ...
We hope to ...
I plan to ...
I intend to ...
The chances are ...
It is likely to / that ...

Asking how much time is needed

How long will it take to ...?
What's the timescale on this?

Asking about immediate action

Where does this leave us?
What's the next step?

Time expressions

Over the next few weeks ...
By the end of the / next month ...
By Tuesday ...
In the short / medium / long term ...
In the long run ...

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Practically speaking | How to encourage people

1 35▶ Listen to five extracts from conversations. Which of the phrases a–e below show the speaker is

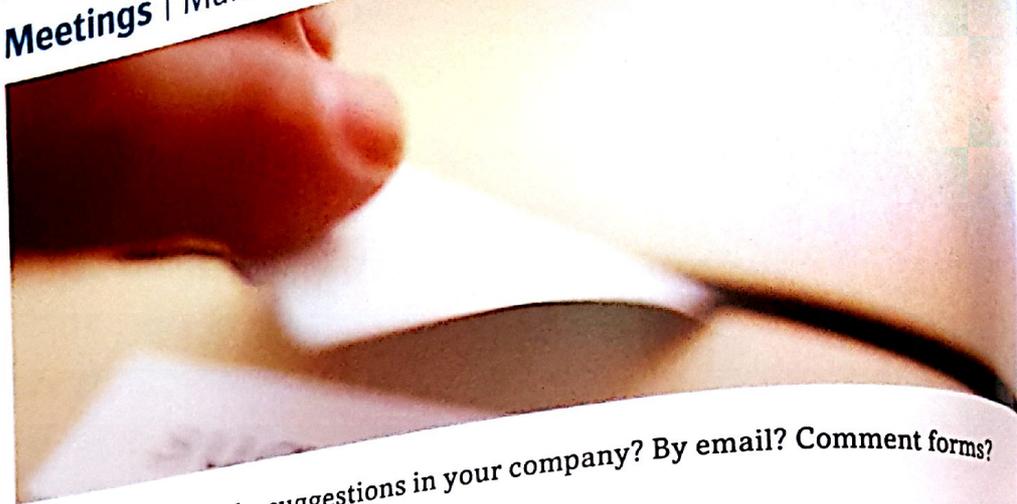
- 1 very happy about something? _____
- 2 not very sure about something? _____

- a Well done!
- b It's a start.
- c Great work, everyone.
- d That's an excellent idea.
- e That has potential.

2 Work in small groups. You have two minutes to do one of the following.

- Come up with an idea to improve something in your workplace.
- Write a new slogan for your company.
- Design a visual diagram of your company's activities and partners.

3 Look at everyone else's creations or listen to their ideas. Take turns to comment on them.



- 1 How do you make suggestions in your company? By email? Comment forms? Do you use a suggestion box?
- 2 Complete the comments below from a suggestion box using phrases from the list.
why don't have you thought about we could always couldn't we do

Comment form

Because so many women work here now, I _____ we have a crèche for young children? Then parents wouldn't have so many problems with childcare. And ² _____ see our children at lunchtimes, which would also be good for motivation.

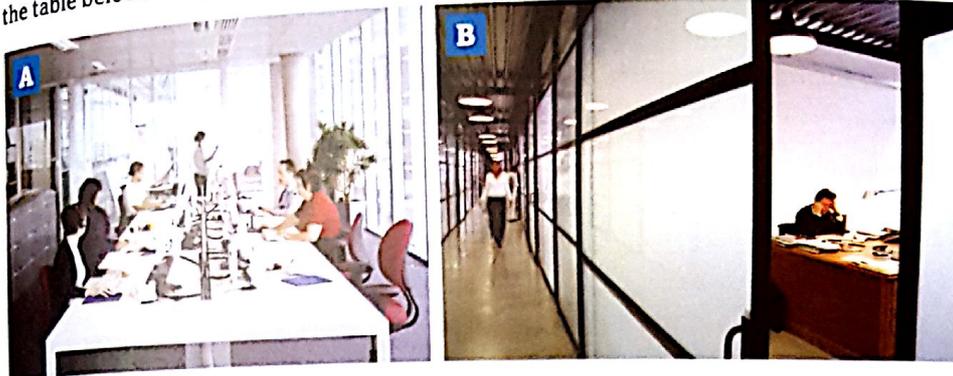
Comment form

I don't want to complain about the new relaxation room - it's extremely comfortable and spacious. But ³ _____ having some entertainment in there? I read about employees at Microsoft where they have a special room called an Anarchy Zone. They can play computer games, table football, or watch MTV. ⁴ _____ something like that?

- 3 43▷ An architect is making initial recommendations to a facilities manager for a new office layout. They have looked at employee suggestions and started to draw up plans for it. They are discussing ideas for a crèche and a relaxation area. Listen and answer questions 1-2.
 - 1 Why can they only choose one of the ideas?
 - 2 Which one do they choose and why?
- 4 Choose the correct answer from the words in *italics*.
 - 1 Well, it might prove *difficult* / *difficulties* to have both.
 - 2 I think we should consider *have* / *having* ...
 - 3 Besides, I have a few *reserves* / *reservations* about ...
 - 4 You might be *better* / *the best* off without it ...
 - 5 I'd rather not *have* / *having* it.
 - 6 I'd recommend *to put* / *putting* it here.
- 5 43▷ Listen again and tick (✓) the responses you hear in the meeting.
 - 1 I really like it. ____
 - 2 Good idea. ____
 - 3 Sorry, but I don't think that would work. ____
 - 4 I'm not sure. ____
 - 5 Great! ____
 - 6 Exactly. ____

» For more exercises, go to Practice file 10 on page 120.

- 6 Work with a partner. An architect is redesigning your office space. Look at these two styles of office and read about some advantages and disadvantages for each in the table below. Can you add any more?



	Style A	Style B
Advantages	friendly, easy to communicate	good for concentration, private
Disadvantages	noisy, harder for private conversation	not as social, old-fashioned

- 7 Now prepare and give your recommendations for one of the office styles in 6 using phrases from 4. Student A, promote style A. Student B, promote style B. Respond to the recommendations you hear. Try to come to an agreement with your partner.

Example: A I'd recommend having an open-plan office because ...

B I think we should consider building closed offices because ...

- 8 Work in small groups. Imagine your company lets you have an Anarchy Zone – an area to relax and forget about work for a few minutes – with four items in it.

- 1 Make suggestions for what you would put in your Anarchy Zone. For example, a TV, computer games, books, etc. Give reasons for these suggestions. Respond to others' ideas. Decide on four items you will have in the zone.
- 2 Present your final recommendations to the rest of the class.
- 3 Comment on the other groups' recommendations.

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Practically speaking | How to link ideas

- 1 Read sentences 1–5. Underline the two reasons given in each sentence. What word or phrase links the reasons?

- 1 I can't apply for the job because it's in Madrid. Besides, I don't have the right experience.
- 2 We chose this design because it's very modern and on top of that, it's cheaper.
- 3 Starting work at 8.00 a.m. means I avoid rush hour and also have longer evenings.
- 4 I like it here – my new colleagues are very helpful, as well as being friendly.
- 5 The company offers flexitime, which creates a better working atmosphere, and in addition to that, we have increased productivity.

- 2 Work with a partner. Talk about the topics below. Join the two reasons using the linkers from 1 above.

Example: I want a new job because I dislike my current boss and also, the pay is very low.

- 1 New job: dislike my current boss + pay is very low
- 2 Buy new car: current car is ten years old + it often breaks down
- 3 Take a holiday: very tired + no days off work for a year
- 4 Study English: important for work + useful for holidays abroad

Key expressions

Suggesting

- What / How about (+ -ing)?
- Why don't we (+ verb)?
- Maybe we should (+ verb) ...
- Maybe / Perhaps we could (+ verb) ...
- Couldn't we (+ verb) ...
- Have you thought about (+ -ing) ...
- We could always (+ verb) ...

Recommending

- I think we should consider (+noun / -ing) ...
- We might be better off (+ -ing) ...
- It's probably worth (+ -ing) ...
- It might prove (+ adjective) ...
- I have a few reservations about (+ noun / -ing) ...
- I'd rather not (+ verb) ...
- I'd recommend (+ that / -ing) ...
- It would be better (+ infinitive) ...

Responding

- I really like it.
- It's / That's a good idea.
- Sorry, but I don't think that would work.
- I'm not sure.
- Great.
- Exactly.

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Business communication skills

Meetings | Participating in a discussion



1 48▷ In 2002, Stefan, Ilse, and Patrick founded an independent computer games shop in the backstreets of a large historic town. It is popular with students and young people who live in the area. A new shopping centre is opening outside town and they are discussing whether they should move their business there. Listen to three extracts from their discussion. Who

- 1 thinks they should start to think about growing? ____
- 2 mentions how easy it will be to park at the shopping centre? ____
- 3 reminds everyone about who their customers are? ____
- 4 suggests keeping the shop in town as well as going to the shopping centre? ____
- 5 is worried that there won't be any well-located shops left in the shopping centre? ____
- 6 would like to wait and see what big retailers plan to do? ____
- 7 suggests asking for independent advice? ____

2 48▷ Listen again. Put phrases a–l below into categories 1–6.

- 1 Giving an opinion: _____
- 2 Agreeing: _____
- 3 Asking if there is a general agreement: _____
- 4 Acknowledging what someone else says: _____
- 5 Summarizing what someone has said: _____
- 6 Asking for suggestions for future action: _____

- a Personally, I think we should ...
- b I agree with you, ...
- c I hear what you're saying, (but) ...
- d That's a nice idea, (but) ...
- e As far as I'm concerned, it's ...
- f I take your point, (but) ...
- g According to ...,
- h So if I've understood you correctly, ...
- i So, where do we go from here?
- j So are we all agreed, then?
- k Yes, that's fine with me.
- l Me too.

» For more exercises, go to Practice file 11 on page 122.

- 3 Work with a partner. Take turns to choose a statement about using email from the list of pros and cons and exchange opinions. Use expressions from 2. You can add your own ideas if you want.

Example: A *As far as I'm concerned, email is the best form of communication in business because it's so fast and inexpensive.*

B *I hear what you're saying but you don't always get an answer straight away.*

A *Yes, good point.*

Pros: Email is the best form of communication in business because

- it's so fast and inexpensive
- you can send documents as attachments – no need to wait for the post
- you can pick up messages wherever you are in the world
- it gives you more time to think than a phone call does
- it means you have an accurate record of communications with a customer.

Cons: Email is not that great because

- you don't always get an answer straight away
- it's not as private as a letter
- you don't always have access to a computer
- it's not as personal as a handwritten letter
- it's easy to delete messages by mistake and therefore lose important information.

- 4 Work in small groups. A number of people where you work want your organization to become more ethical and democratic. Have a discussion on these proposals and decide whether to accept them or not.

- 1 All decisions will be made democratically using a 'works parliament'. Each member of staff will have one vote for every year they have worked at the firm (with a maximum of five votes).
- 2 For the health of employees, from now on the staff restaurant will only serve sugar-free soft drinks, decaffeinated coffee, and vegetarian meals.
- 3 As parking at the company is limited, only cars which carry at least two employees will be permitted to park.
- 4 At the moment, the highest paid worker earns ten times more than the lowest paid. This will be reduced to a four-to-one ratio.

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Practically speaking | How to be persuasive

- 1 49▶ Listen to these extracts and note down the four phrases the speakers use to sound more persuasive.

1 _____ 3 _____
2 _____ 4 _____

- 2 Match the phrases in 1 to meanings a–d.

- a I am about to mention something important we shouldn't forget. —
- b Be reasonable. —
- c I am going to tell the truth as I see it. —
- d We need to be realistic. —

- 3 Work with a partner or in small groups. Discuss the following statements. Give yourself a point for each time you use one of the phrases from 1.

- First impressions are nearly always the most reliable.
- Private health insurance creates inequality among people who are ill.
- All workers should receive a share of the company's profits.
- Two heads are always better than one.

Key expressions

Giving your opinion

Personally, I think / feel ...
I think we should ...
In my opinion, ...
From my point of view, ...
As I see it, ...
As far as I'm concerned, ...

Giving someone else's opinion

X says that we should ...
According to X ...
X maintains that ...

Agreeing / disagreeing

I agree.
Exactly.
Absolutely.
I couldn't agree more.
I don't agree.
Yes, but ...
I'm not (quite) sure about that ...
That's fine with me.

Acknowledging what someone else says

Yes, good point.
I take your point.
I hear what you're saying, ...
I can understand what you're saying.
Yes, fair enough.

Checking understanding

So what you're saying is ...
So if I've followed what you've said, ...
So if I understand you correctly, ...

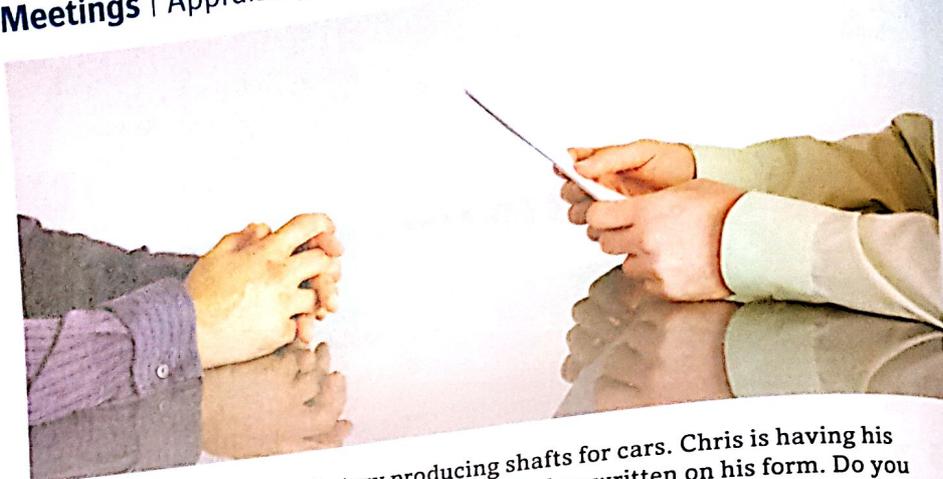
Reaching a decision

Does everyone agree?
Are we all agreed?
Is everyone happy with that?

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Business communication skills

Meetings | Appraising performance and setting objectives



- 1** Chris Hately works in a factory producing shafts for cars. Chris is having his six-month performance review. Read what he has written on his form. Do you have similar forms at work?

Part A

Please answer the questions on this form and return to your line manager before your performance review.

- 1 Have the last six months been good / bad / satisfactory? Why?
Good. I've really learned a lot since I started here and everyone has been really helpful.
- 2 What do you consider are your most important achievements in the last six months?
I completed my initial training in June and was given a permanent contract.
- 3 Which parts of the job interest you the most? And the least?
Solving problems with machinery.
- 4 How could your performance be improved in your current position?
Just continue what I'm doing - by learning more.

- 2** 62▷ Listen to the first part of Chris's performance review and add any extra information to his answers in 1. Then compare these with a partner.

- 3** 62▷ Match 1-7 to a-g then listen and check your answers.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 In ... ____ | a doing very well. |
| 2 We're very pleased ... ____ | b to work on. |
| 3 You seem to be ... ____ | c general ... |
| 4 One thing I wanted ... ____ | d about working with other people? |
| 5 Is it an area ... ____ | e you'd like to develop? |
| 6 How do you feel ... ____ | f with your performance. |
| 7 That's something I need ... ____ | g to discuss was ... |

- 4** 63▷ Listen to the final part of the meeting and answer questions 1-3.

- 1 How does Chris's manager signal that it is the end of the meeting?
- 2 What have they agreed to do?
- 3 What two questions does Chris's manager ask to check agreement?

» For more exercises, go to Practice file 15 on page 130.

Tip | Being less direct

You can use the past simple instead of the present simple to sound less direct, especially in sensitive situations.

One thing I wanted to discuss was ...

One thing I want to discuss is ...

Both are correct, but the first one is less direct.

5 Imagine you have a performance review. Complete this form for your job.

Part A

Please answer the questions on this form and return to your line manager before your appraisal.

- 1 Have the last six months been good / bad / satisfactory? Why?
- 2 What do you consider are your most important achievements in the last six months?
- 3 Which parts of the job interest you the most? And the least?
- 4 How could your performance be improved in your current position?

6 Now take turns to appraise your partner using the form they completed in 5. The person leading the meeting should

- make general comments at the beginning
- give specific feedback
- discuss and ask questions about performance
- set and agree objectives at the end.

7 Work with a partner. Take turns to talk about one of the areas below. Evaluate your performance in the area you choose and say what improvements you could make. Decide with your partner on a plan of action.

- a hobby
- a sport you do
- your progress in English

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Key expressions

Giving a formal appraisal

Overall ... / In general ...
I'm / We're very happy / pleased with your performance.
You seem to be doing very well.
One of your key strengths is ...
Perhaps one thing to work on / consider is ...
One thing I wanted to discuss was ...

Encouraging self-evaluation

How do you feel about ...?
How are you getting on with ...?
Have you thought about ...?
What do you think would help you to ...?
Is this an area you'd like to develop?

Evaluating your own performance

I'm really happy with ...
Something I need to work on is ...
I think ... is an area for improvement.

Setting objectives

So let's summarize what we've agreed.
One thing you're going to ...
You intend to ...
You need to think about ...

Agreeing objectives

How does that sound?
Is that OK with you?
Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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Practically speaking | How to give feedback

1 64, 65 ▶ Listen to two different versions of a conversation between Chris and his supervisor. What are the differences?

2 64 ▶ Listen to the first version again. Complete these phrases.

- 1 You're doing _____.
- 2 That's _____.
- 3 You've done a _____.
- 4 _____ done.
- 5 _____ at it.

3 Write three jobs you have completed recently. Work with a partner. Take turns to give your partner feedback on their completed jobs using phrases in 2.

Example: A I've just finished my report.
B That's great! Well done.

Business communication skills

Meetings | Reporting back



- 1** How popular are traditional handicrafts and furnishings in your country? Where do most of them come from?
- 2** 71, 72▷ Trimpo is a retail chain selling traditional goods in shops across Europe. Paul O'Reilly is the chief buyer at the business's head office in Brussels. Two of his team have been on fact-finding trips abroad. Listen to Paul's conversations with Olli and Sandrine and complete this table.

Olli

Sandrine

Destination

Impressions and verdict

Next step

- 3** 72▷ These phrases are from the first conversation. Listen to the second conversation again and write phrases that mean the same.

- 1 How was your trip? _____
- 2 I'll fill you in on everything. _____
- 3 So, what were your overall impressions? _____
- 4 I was impressed with ... _____
- 5 What makes you say that? _____
- 6 This underlines the importance of ... _____
- 7 What we need to do now is ... _____
- 8 We should focus on ... _____

- 4** Choose a phrase from 3 to complete this conversation. Compare your version with a partner.

A ¹ _____ in Australia?

B It could have started better!

A ² _____?

A Well, the airline lost my suitcase. Otherwise it went very well, thanks.

B So ³ _____ of the operations there?

A I have to say that, on the whole, ⁴ _____ everything apart from one area.

B ⁵ _____.

A Well, it seems like there are real problems with cash flow.

B I suppose this ⁶ _____ to find a better system of payment.

A Yes, we really ⁷ _____ on improving this aspect of the business before we do anything else.

» For more exercises, go to Practice file 16 on page 132.



5 Work with a partner. You both work for K@ravanzerai, a travel agency specializing in adventure activity holidays. Report back to each other on a fact-finding mission. Student A, turn to File 40 on page 145. Student B, use the information below.

Student B

Situation 1
You are Student A's boss. Ask for a report on his / her trip. Ask him / her to justify his / her opinions. Identify action for the future.

Situation 2
You have been on a fact-finding trip to Brazil to find out about eco-holidays. Student A is your boss and will ask you to give a general evaluation of the trip and emphasize what you consider important. Read this information and prepare to report back on what happened.

Destination: Brazil
Contact: Nelson Dos Santos, Brazilian tour operator
Business: Green holidays
Impressions: Very well organized. Good supervision of visitors. Medical kit. Expert on the rain forest. Very good team of guides. Comfortable base-camp facilities. Difficult to get to base camp. Staff speak limited English.
Verdict: A good prospect if access and language barrier can be improved.
Next step: Try to convince him to join us. Send someone as guinea pig to see what the holidays are really like. Take photos for brochure.

6 Work with a partner. Think of a challenging situation you have experienced. Tell your partner what happened and what you learnt from the experience. This might have been

- a job interview
- going on a business trip
- using English on the phone.

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Key expressions

Asking for feedback
How was your trip?
How did it go in / at / with ...?
What were your overall impressions?
So, give me an overview.

Introducing feedback
I'll / Let me fill you in on ...
I'll / Let me bring you up to date on ...

Giving a general evaluation
It could have gone better.
It wasn't what I expected.
I was pleasantly surprised.
I was quite impressed with ...
There were no big surprises.

Asking for a justification
What makes you say that?
Tell me more.
Why do you say that?

Emphasizing
This underlines the importance of (+ -ing)...
This highlights the need to (+ verb)...

Identifying future action
What we need to do now is ...
I think the next step is to ...
We need to concentrate on ...
We should focus on ...

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Practically speaking | How to generalize

1 Underline the words in this list that we use to make generalizations.

on the whole particularly all in all especially overall
mainly in particular mostly in general generally speaking

2 73▶ Work with a partner. Take turns to make sentences with prompts 1-7 using as many of the words you underlined in 1 as you can. Listen and compare your answers.

*Example: In general / generally speaking, I prefer to travel by train.
I mainly / mostly prefer to travel by train.*

- 1 / prefer / travel / by train
- 2 we / operate / in / the Far East
- 3 I / thought / it / was / an excellent presentation
- 4 we / don't / work / at weekends
- 5 it / was / a great trip
- 6 we / communicate / in English
- 7 I / was / very happy / with the way it went

3 Work with a partner. Make sentences about these ideas using words / phrases you underlined in 1. Then compare your sentences with another group. Say how you feel about

- a trip you've been on
- your progress in English
- travelling
- your company's recent performance.
- your work