

1 Participating in meetings

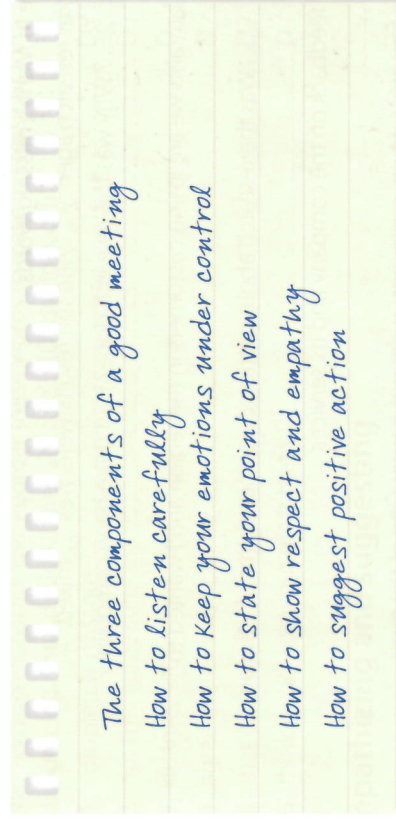
In this unit:

- the three stages of a successful meeting
- how to participate effectively at each stage



1.3 The expert view

- 4 Watch Andrew talk about the stages of a successful meeting and the skills you need for participating effectively. While you watch, make notes on Andrew's comments using the headings below.



For a summary of how to participate in meetings, read the article on page 52.

1.4 Analysis

- 5 Watch the meeting again and analyse Maria's participation. Make notes about her performance, including her body language or the language that she uses.

1.1 Talking points

- 1 Consider these questions.
How can you make sure everyone participates in a meeting?
How do you handle people who disagree with you?
- 2 While you watch other people talking about the questions above, compare their experience with yours.

1.2 The meeting

- 3 Watch the first part of a meeting between four people at the energy company QPG. As you watch, answer the questions below.
- 1 What is the meeting about?
 - 2 What is Maria's role?
 - 3 Why was the market research done?
 - 4 What was the research about?
 - 5 Why are customers leaving?
 - 6 Why doesn't Anna want to train staff again 'from scratch' (= from the beginning)?
 - 7 What does Maria suggest they should review?
 - 8 Does Anna agree to look at the report with Maria?



	Does Maria ...	Notes
Sharing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• listen carefully?• check her understanding?	
Discussing ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• keep her emotions under control?• show respect and empathy for other people's concerns?	
Deciding on the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• try to reach agreement?• suggest ideas in a positive way?	

How does Anna participate in this meeting? How is her participation different from Maria's?

1.5 The expert feedback

- 6 Watch Andrew's analysis of the participants in this meeting. How do his comments about Maria and Anna compare to your analysis?

Language focus

1.6 Asking for and checking information

1 Watch the first part of the meeting again. David is sharing information. Maria asks for and checks the information. Write in Maria's missing words.

David: We worked with a market research agency ... And the results were, well ... mixed.
 Maria: Sorry, ¹ _____? Why was this research done? Had there been complaints or ...?

David: Some complaints, yes, but also we are losing customers in the region and I wanted to know why.

Maria: Sorry, ² _____. Was the research about getting customer points of view or about customer profiles?

David: It was to get customer feedback on the company and its services.

Maria: Right, ³ _____.

David: So the results showed a few areas where customers were not happy. One of the most common ... how shall I put it ... issues, was with the call centre.

Maria: I see. ⁴ _____?

David: Well, basically, it seems that customers feel they are not getting good service, and they are leaving us for another supplier.

Maria: Right. So ⁵ _____ customers are leaving us because of the service from the staff or could there be other reasons too? I mean, ⁶ _____ that we haven't got very good systems in place for our staff?

Paul: Yeah, could be.

2 Replace Maria's expressions 1–6 in 1 with the similar phrases below.

- do you mean _____
- I understand. _____
- Let me make sure I understand you correctly. _____
- I'm not sure I follow you. _____
- Could you explain that in a bit more detail? _____
- is it possible _____

3 Notice how Maria avoids being too direct and uses polite language when she asks questions and gives suggestions.

'So are you saying customers are leaving us because of the service from the staff, or could there be other reasons too?'

Make the sentences below more polite by using an appropriate expression from 1 or 2.

- I don't understand you!
- OK. I get what you mean.
- That's a bit vague. What do you mean exactly?
- The plan is probably too expensive.
- There was a problem with the design. Right?

TIP: SORRY

You can interrupt politely by starting with the word *Sorry* and then asking your question or expressing your opinion:

Sorry, can I just check ...
Sorry but ...
Sorry to interrupt but ...

Stating opinions and disagreeing

4 In the video Anna's opinions are very direct, which can seem rude. Starting completely from scratch seems like a waste of time and money. They all receive training when they start anyway. Generally, people try to disagree in a more indirect way. Starting from the beginning might be expensive. I'm not sure that they need additional training. Reorder these words to make expressions for disagreeing. Then decide if they are direct (D) or indirect (I).

- completely I disagree _____ D / I
- not I'm I agree sure _____ D / I
- disagree afraid have I'm to I _____ D / I
- agree there's way I can no _____ D / I
- that can't we do _____ D / I
- think I work sorry but don't that will _____ D / I

Empathizing and suggesting

5 Maria often shows empathy with Anna during the meeting. For example:

'Anna, I realize it's not easy for you to suggest more training for your staff ... I understand your point about possibly wasting time and money.'

Choose the correct verb in the sentences below that show empathy.

- I know / realize / take your point about the need for additional training.
- I can realize / take / understand your concerns about Martin's performance.
- I follow / realize / take it isn't easy for you to cut marketing costs but we need to make savings.
- I agree / appreciate / take what you're saying but I'm afraid some staff will have to go.
- I can agree / see / take where you're coming from with this idea and will seriously consider it.

6 Maria also shows the importance of making positive suggestions. For example:

'I wondered if we could start with a review of the current training approach ... perhaps you and I could look at the report together.'

Match the first part of the suggestion 1–5 to the second part a–e.

- I wondered if _____
 a meeting next week to go through all the proposals that have been suggested?
- Perhaps you and I could _____
 you could reduce your marketing budget by cutting back on magazine advertising.
- Could it be _____
 should schedule a meeting to discuss how to deal with the staff cutbacks.
- Maybe we _____
 that Martin needs to go on a training course?
- How about _____
 discuss our specific training needs next week?

7 Now empathize and make positive suggestions by matching an expression of empathy in 5 to a positive suggestion in 6.

For example: 1–b5 I take your point about the need for additional training. Perhaps you and I could discuss our specific training needs next week?



Meetings task: participating in a meeting

Work in a group of four. You all work for a food retail company with supermarkets across the country. This year, profits fell by 15% at your traditional stores but business at your online store rose by 32%. Although the traditional supermarkets are still profitable, the company is worried that profits might continue to fall. Recently your company carried out a survey about online shopping. You are meeting to discuss the main results of this survey. This is the agenda:

- 1 Person A will summarize the main points of the survey. (5 minutes)
- 2 Discussion of the survey and suggestions for possible action. (10 minutes)
- 3 Agreement of action plan for the future. (5 minutes)

Read the roles below and spend a few minutes preparing on your own for the meeting. At the meeting, listen to Student A summarizing the main results of the survey and take notes. Then discuss your ideas and give your opinion.

Student A: Turn to File A on page 58.

Student B: Turn to File B on page 59.

Student C: Turn to File C on page 60.

Student D: You are the chairperson. Turn to File D on page 61.

Alternative task

Work in small groups. Each person thinks of one problem at their place of work. For example, a problem with communication between departments, a problem with finding a space for meetings, etc. Meet with your colleagues and take turns to share information about your problem. Then discuss everyone's ideas for a solution and decide on some action to be taken.

Useful phrases

Asking for and checking information

Can I check something?
 Can you explain that in more detail?
 Do you mean that ...?
 Let me check I understand correctly.
 I'm not sure I understand.
 Sorry, I don't follow you.
 Can you be more specific?
 Can you give me an example?
 So are you saying ...?
 Right, I see.

Agreeing and disagreeing

Personally, I think we should ...
 I (completely) agree with you.
 I agree up to a point.
 Sorry but I disagree / can't agree.
 To be honest, I'm not convinced.

Empathizing

I take your point ...
 I know what you're saying ...
 I realize it isn't easy for you ...
 I understand your concerns ...
 I see where you're coming from but ...

Making suggestions

Perhaps we could / should ...
 So why don't we ...?
 How about ...? / What about ...?
 Have you thought about ...?
 Have you considered ...?
 What if we / you ...?
 Let's ...
 I suggest ...
 If I were you, I'd ...

Task assessment

Use this checklist to assess your meeting, including explanations where appropriate. Afterwards, compare and discuss your assessment with the rest of the group.

Stages of a successful meeting

Did your meeting follow all the stages of a successful meeting?

- Sharing information
- Discussing ideas
- Deciding action

Comments

All the participants

Did all the participants at your meeting demonstrate these skills?

- Listen carefully
- Keep emotions under control
- Show respect and empathy
- Suggest positive action

Comments

You

Were you able to do the following at the meeting?

- Ask for and check information
- Ask for and give your opinions
- Make suggestions

Comments
