

3 Informal meetings

In this unit:

- making informal meetings effective
- leading an informal team meeting



3.3 The expert view

4 While you watch Andrew talk about informal team meetings, answer the questions below.

- 1 What is one of the most common problems with informal meetings?
- 2 Why are informal meetings difficult to control?
- 3 What are the three things you need to achieve in an informal meeting?
- 4 What is the best way to learn about progress?
- 5 After discussing a problem, what should you do before moving on to the next person?
- 6 Why is informal conversation useful at a meeting?
- 7 What did research show about the effects of holding a meeting standing up?
- 8 What is a good technique for teaching your team responsibility at meetings?

For a summary of how to chair informal meetings, read the article on page 53.

3.4 Analysis

5 Watch the team meeting again and analyse it using this feedback form. Tick (✓) the scale between 'very' and 'not very'. Note down any examples that support your feedback.

	Very	Not very	Examples
How informal and relaxed is the meeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How good was the balance between 'talk' and 'action'?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How effective is the team leader at identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what progress has been made? - any problems? - what action is needed and summing it up? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How well do the team members take responsibility for updating and taking action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3.5 The expert feedback

6 Watch Andrew's analysis of this meeting. How do his comments compare to your analysis?

3.1 Talking points

1 Consider these questions.
Why do you have team meetings?
When do team meetings work well?

2 While you watch other people talking about the questions above, compare their experience with yours.

3.2 The meeting

3 Watch part of a team meeting in the HR Department of the energy company QPG. While you watch, complete Paul's notes in the table below.



Item and person	Progress and / or problems	Agreed action or comments
Temps: Karina	Problems with receptionist and the temp agency	1 _____
Call centre training: Maria	Two external trainers are running courses. Call centre staff are not attending training.	2 _____
Intranet training: Maria	3 _____	No action. Maria to speak to Matt and Lucy.
One-day event for schools: Maria	Preparing proposal for David in Marketing on 'schools' day'	4 _____
Interviewing Monica at 1.30 p.m.: Karina	5 _____	Paul to interview Monica with Maja.

Language focus

3.6 Talking about current progress

- 1 Watch two extracts from the discussion between Paul and Maria. Listen and write in the missing words and expressions.

Extract 1

Paul: So, how are things going? Maria? What ¹ _____ in the Training Department this week?

Maria: So far so good. We have two external trainers in this week. One of them ² _____ with call centre staff at the other site so I hope they all turn up ...

Extract 2

Paul: And what about the intranet training? How ³ _____ with that?

Maria: We ⁴ _____ for IT to say they're ready. I think there have been some delays but now they ⁵ _____ me it'll be ready next month. I have an update meeting this week with Matt and Lucy.

Paul: They really are behind on that, aren't they? So, is that everything for the Training Department?

Maria: I ⁶ _____ something for David in Marketing ...

- 2 In sentences 1–6 in 1, Paul and Maria talk about current progress using a particular tense. Which tense is it? When do we use this tense?

- 3 Complete these expressions for asking about progress with the words below.

- progressing fill are happening update coming
- How's the new building work _____ along? Is everything OK?
 - What's _____ in your department this week?
 - How's the new IT project? Is everything _____ well?
 - How's it going with the market research? Can you _____ us on your progress?
 - How _____ things at your end? Any issues to report?
 - Can you _____ us in on how things are going with the marketing campaign?

Discussing projects and schedules

- 4 During progress updates, we check if a project is progressing well or if there are problems.

MARIA 'They are telling me it'll be ready next month.'

PAUL 'They really are behind on that, aren't they?'

Look at these phrases for talking about projects and schedules. Tick (✓) if the project is progressing well or put a cross (X) if it is progressing badly.

The project is ...	ahead of schedule ✓	behind schedule X	on schedule ✓
The project is ...	under budget	over budget	within budget
We're going to ...	make the deadline	miss the deadline	miss the deadline
The project is ... / We are ...	in trouble	back on track	on track (to do sth)
We finished the work ...	late	on time	ahead of time

- 5 Complete the sentences with some of the phrases from 4.

- We're _____ schedule so we should finish the work a few weeks before the deadline.
- They're really behind on this and the labour costs are rising. I'm concerned the project will go _____ budget.
- We had a few problems but they've all been fixed so we're _____ track!
- Our client needs the equipment by 1st June or they can't start their work. So don't _____ the deadline!
- Thanks to our new software, the project came in \$20,000 _____ budget. It saved us a lot of time and money.
- We've completed each of the stages _____ time so we're on track to meet the June deadline.

Offering help and delegating

- 6 In the video, Paul tries to solve problems and difficulties by offering his help or delegating:

(to Maria) 'I'm meeting Anna today so I'll mention it.'

(to Karina) 'Would you like to look at some new temp agencies in the meantime?'

Read Karina's problem. Complete Paul's response with these phrases.

- Don't worry, I'll do ... Would you ... Could ... Shall I ...
Would you like me ...
- Karina: I'm away next week and so I need somebody to organize the temporary staff.
Paul: _____ anyone here do it?
 - Karina: I'm going to be late tomorrow so I won't be able to show our visitors round in the morning.
Paul: _____ take them round? I'm free in the morning.
 - Karina: I can't understand how this new accounting software works.
Paul: _____ to show you how to use it? It's not that complicated.
 - Karina: We have two people away next week so I have to organize the conference on my own.
Paul: _____ be able to help her, Rachel?
 - Karina: I'm not going to have time to train the new assistant.
Paul: _____ it for you. I'm not that busy right now.

TIP: SUMMARIZING

We often sum up what action has been agreed for the future by using the verb form *going to* + verb. Notice how Paul uses it in his summary:
Let's just recap. I'm going to get back to you when I've spoken to Anna about the call centre training. You're going to speak to Matt and Lucy about the intranet training, and you're going to proceed with caution with David on the schools event.



Meetings task: a team meeting

Work in groups of four. You are having an informal meeting with a team of colleagues at work. The aim of the meeting is to update each other on what is happening in your departments. Study the information about your current project and then start the meeting.

- 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: Turn to File D on page 61.

Take turns to be the chairperson. Student A is the chairperson first. Ask Student B to update everyone on the progress of their project. Everyone can ask questions and, where possible, offer to help or you can delegate someone to help. At the end of this progress report, Student A sums up any action to be taken.

Next, Student B becomes the new chairperson and asks Student C to update everyone on their progress. Repeat this process until everyone has updated on their current progress and has also been the team leader at the meeting.

Alternative task

Update your group on what is happening in your real job. Make some notes about two or three projects you are currently involved in or things you are doing this week. In your notes, write down:

- what the projects are
- who else is working with you on the projects
- any important dates and deadlines
- any problems that are currently affecting the projects.

Useful phrases

Asking about progress

How are things going?

What's happening in your department this week?

How is everything in your department?

What's the current situation with ...?

Is that everything?

Discussing projects and schedules

We're currently in discussion with / meeting / talking to ...

The project is under budget / within budget / ahead of schedule / on schedule / back on track.

The project is behind schedule / over budget / in trouble.

We've hit a problem / missed the deadline.

Clarifying problems

What (exactly) is the problem?

What do you mean (exactly)?

Are you saying that ...?

So is the problem that ...?

Can you give me an example?

Can you expand upon that last point?

Offering help

I'll do it. / I can do it if that helps.

Shall I do it?

Would you like me to do it?

Leave it with me.

Delegating

Can you / Could you do it?

Would you be able to ...?

I need somebody to ...

Would someone ... for me?

Could anyone / Is anyone free to ...?

Summarizing the action to be taken

To recap / To sum up ...

I'm going to ... / We're going to ... / He's going to ...

We've also agreed that ...

Task assessment

Use this form to assess the meeting, the team leader, and the rest of the team. Add comments where appropriate.

The meeting	Not very						Very						Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	
How informal and relaxed was the meeting?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
How good was the balance between 'talk' and 'action'?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
The team leader													Comments
How effective was the team leader at:													
▶ asking about current progress?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
▶ discussing any problems?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
▶ delegating and offering to help?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
▶ summing up action to be taken?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
The participants													Comments
How well did the participants:													
▶ discuss any problems?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
▶ offer to help?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	