

Meeting Essentials

Essential Business English
for Effective Meetings



BUSINESS ENGLISH POD

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3rd Edition

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Introduction

Meetings take many forms, from large formal situations, such as year-end reviews, to small informal discussions, such as a quick team check-in. In this 11-unit audio eBook, you will learn essential business English for participating in a wide range of meetings. The aim is to help you communicate clearly and confidently, whether you are contributing to discussions or leading them.

The 3rd edition of *Meeting Essentials* features updated content across all units, including new explanations and examples. The accompanying audio recordings have been newly produced, along with improved versions of the original dialogs.

The course begins with three lessons on agreeing, disagreeing, and expressing opinions. This is followed by two units on making, accepting, and rejecting suggestions. Next, you will learn how to ask for and provide clarification. In the final four units, the focus shifts to running meetings, including opening a meeting, managing the discussion, handling interruptions, and finishing effectively.

Each lesson starts with an introduction to the topic, followed by a dialog that demonstrates key language and skills. In the debrief section, the main points are explained, along with important vocabulary and example phrases. Finally, each unit includes a practice section to help you apply what you have learned.

To get the most from this course, it is important to study actively. Listen to each unit several times. Start by listening without the transcript, then review it again with the text. Identify and review unfamiliar words. Focus on language in context, including common collocations and typical sentence structures.

Complete the practice activities in each unit more than once. On your second attempt, try using alternative expressions. This will help improve your fluency and flexibility. You may also find it useful to record yourself, write and practice dialogs, or study with a partner.

Meeting Essentials is designed for learners at an intermediate level (CEFR B1-B2), or those with a BULATS score of 40+ or an IELTS score of 4+ or a TOEIC score of 450+. However, the material is suitable for a range of levels. Intermediate learners can focus on building core language skills, while more advanced learners can develop fluency, expand vocabulary, and improve overall communication in professional settings.

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Unit 201 - Expressing Opinions

Hello and welcome back to Business English Pod. My name's Edwin, and I'll be your host for today's lesson on expressing opinions in English.

Imagine you're in a difficult meeting where everyone is disagreeing. Tension is high. And the boss turns to you and says "so what do *you* think?" In this situation, you need to express your opinion. But giving an opinion isn't always easy, as you surely know. You've got to say it the right way.

But the right way has changed a bit. Ten to fifteen years ago business meetings were often quite formal. But many meetings today tend to be more informal. And you can see this change in the different ways of expressing opinions in English. Sometimes we need to be cautious, while at other times we might want to be more direct or stronger. And there's still a difference between giving opinions in a group setting and speaking informally.

When we want to be informal, we are often more direct. We say exactly what we think. But when we're being formal or cautious, we tend to add words and expressions to soften our opinions. We also use words like "might" and "could" instead of "must" and "should." Overall, we try not to sound too strong or direct.

In today's dialog, we'll hear a conversation between Kerry, Nick, Gregory, and Lola. Their company hired a freelance writer to do some work, but the writer hasn't communicated with them lately. Kerry is asking the group for their opinions about what they should do.

As you listen to the dialog, try to answer the following questions:

1. How does Kerry ask Vincent for his opinion near the start of the meeting?
2. What expression does Gregory use to introduce his strong opinion?
3. What is one expression that Lola uses to make her opinion careful or cautious?

Vocabulary

Course of action: a way of dealing with a situation; "We're getting all the managers together to figure out a course of action in response to the budget crisis."

Go to print: be sent to a printer; "We're going to need those business card designs by Thursday if we want to go to print first thing Friday."

To creep up: to develop slowly or become closer in time; "Sorry John, I can't help you today. The deadline on my project report is creeping up and I really need to work on it."

To stand on something: to have an opinion or position on something; "So Fay, where do you stand on this whole hiring issue. Do you agree that Marty is the best candidate?"

Draft: a document or drawing that is not final and may be changed; "The proposal is due next Friday, so I'm hoping you can have a draft for me to look at by Thursday this week."

Crisis: an urgent or difficult situation; "Roger, we've got a major crisis down here at the plant. Big chemical spill."

To stretch a timeline: to decide to take longer than expected to do something; "All this rain means we're going to have to stretch the timeline on construction a bit."

To wait something out: to wait until something ends, especially something bad; "We're big enough to wait out this recession, but some of our small suppliers are not."

To chime in: to join a conversation; "Okay, we've heard from the marketing team... anyone else want to chime in on these latest figures?"

Frank: open and honest; "Come on Tom, let's be frank here. There's no way we can cut costs without laying a few people off."

To take a hard line: to take a strict or serious approach to a problem or negotiation; "Looks like management is taking a hard line with the union and refusing to negotiate salaries."

Legal: the legal department of a company; "If the client won't pay up, contact legal. Get them to write a nasty letter. I'm sure they'll cooperate then."

Angle: approach or way of thinking about something; "We're bringing in a facilitator to help us look at our strategy from a few different angles."

To go down a path: to deal with something in a certain way; "A hostile takeover isn't our preferred approach, but we'll go down that path if we have to."

Copy: the text or words for a document, advertisement, or website; "We've got all the design done for the new brochures. All we need is the photos and the copy."

Revisions: changes or corrections to a text; "I think you did a good job on the proposal, but I'd like to suggest some revisions to the budget."

To cut someone loose: to end a relationship with someone, especially a professional or contractual one; "I like Renata too, but there's not enough work to go around so we'll have to cut her loose."

Refill: another amount of liquid put in an emptied container; "Ink refills on the toner cartridges for this new copier are twice as much as for our last one."

Freelancer: a person who sells his or her services to many companies, rather than working for just one employer; "I used to work for KPMG, but I'm much happier now doing accounting work as a freelancer."

To outsource: to hire someone outside your company to do work; "More and more small business owners are choosing to outsource their bookkeeping to India."

Dialog

Kerry: Okay everyone, we need to figure out a **course of action** today. We haven't heard from this guy in, what, two weeks?

Vincent: That's right. He won't even return my calls now.

Gregory: And we planned to **go to print** on the 24th right? That's **creeping up** fast.

Kerry: Then let's talk options. Vincent, can I start with you? Where do you **stand on** this?

Vincent: Well, in my view, I think we should give it a bit more time. His early **drafts** looked good. You know... maybe he's had a **crisis**, and we just have to **stretch the timeline** a bit.

Kerry: Okay, so just **wait it out**? How long do you think we can do that?

Vincent: I feel we could probably give it another week.

Kerry: Alright... I guess that's one way to go. Anyone else? Gregory, you want to **chime in**?

Gregory: Yeah, to be perfectly **frank**, I think we need to **take a hard line** here. This is a job for **legal**. I think it starts with a formal letter. Then we go from there.

Kerry: Okaaay.., the legal **angle**... that's another possibility. But before we **go down** that **path**, I'd like to hear some other ideas. Lola? What do you think we should do here?

Lola: Yeah, so, it would seem to me the **copy** is pretty close to being finished. I mean, we haven't seen any **revisions** after that last draft, but... to be honest they were pretty close, right? Maybe we could just take it the rest of the way ourselves?

Kerry: So just **cut him loose** and work with what we've got? You know, it might be good for us to have a look at that last draft. Give me a sec... I left some copies on my desk. I'll be right back...

Lola: Okay, I'm going to get a **refill**...

Gregory: You know, this is stupid...

Vincent: Why's that?

Gregory: Well, obviously, using **freelancers** is just asking for trouble. If you ask me, we've got to stop **outsourcing** this kind of stuff in the first place.

Vincent: Yeah, I guess you might be right.

Debrief

Now let's go through the dialog again and look at the language the group used in their meeting.

The group needs to figure out what to do quickly because they need the writer's work so they can "go to print" on the 24th of the month.

Kerry: Okay everyone, we need to figure out a **course of action** today. We haven't heard from this guy in, what, two weeks?

Vincent: That's right. He won't even return my calls now.

Gregory: And we planned to **go to print** on the 24th right? That's **creeping up** fast.

Kerry: Then let's talk options. Vincent, can I start with you? Where do you **stand on this**?

Kerry wants people's opinions about what they should do, or their "course of action." So how do you ask for an opinion? Well, you can ask what people think or feel, or ask for their views, thoughts, or opinions. Another way to do this, as Kerry shows, is to ask where someone "stands" on an issue or question.

Let's practice some of these different ways of asking for opinions.

- What do you think of the new website?
- How do you feel about this issue?
- What's your opinion on the budget problems?
- What are your views on this?
- Where do you stand on the hiring decision?
- What are your thoughts on our new strategy?

Kerry has started out by asking for Vincent's opinion. Let's hear how Vincent gives a basic opinion about the issue.

Vincent: Well, in my view, I think we should give it a bit more time. His early **drafts** looked good. You know... maybe he's had a **crisis**, and we just have to **stretch the timeline** a bit.

At this point in the meeting, there's no tension or conflict. Vincent doesn't have to be so careful about how he gives his opinion. This is just a basic example of saying what you think. And that's how you can do it: you can say what you "think," "feel," or "believe." You can also use other expressions like "in my view," as Vincent has done to express a basic opinion.

Let's run through some of these ways of giving basic opinions in English.

- I think this is the right way to go.
- I believe this is our only real option.
- In my view, we need to change some of our policies.
- Personally speaking, this design doesn't really work well.
- I feel this isn't the right time to spend more money on equipment.

Now let's get back to the dialog, as Kerry asks Gregory for his opinion and Gregory shows that he has a pretty strong opinion about the issue.

Kerry: Okay, so just **wait it out**? How long do you think we can do that?

Vincent: I feel we could probably give it another week.

Kerry: Alright... I guess that's one way to go. Anyone else? Gregory, you want to **chime in**?

Gregory: Yeah, to be perfectly **frank**, I think we need to **take a hard line** here. This is a job for **legal**. I think it starts with a formal letter. Then we go from there.

Vincent didn't sound too worried about the situation, but Gregory is definitely concerned. He's upset about the situation with the writer, and he has a strong opinion about how they should deal with the problem. The expression "to be perfectly frank" helps him introduce his strong opinion. When the others hear that expression, they know that Gregory is serious. He also uses very direct language, like "this is a job for legal," instead of something like "I think *maybe* this is a job for legal."

Let's practice some more ways of giving strong opinions with special expressions and direct language.

- To be perfectly frank, there's no way this will work.
- It's obvious to me that customers are going to hate the change.
- As far as I'm concerned, we're spending too much money on this.
- It's clear to me that people aren't happy with the new system.
- I would argue that we need to sell the building as soon as possible.
- There's no doubt in my mind that James is the right person for the job.
- I'm sure that this is the right decision.
- I believe strongly that we need more time to do this.

Next, let's hear what Lola thinks about the situation. Unlike Gregory, she's going to give a cautious, or careful, opinion. Listen to the difference.

Kerry: Okaaaay..., the legal **angle**... that's another possibility. But before we **go down** that **path**, I'd like to hear some other ideas. Lola? What do you think we should do here?

Lola: Yeah, so, it would seem to me the **copy** is pretty close to being finished. I mean, we haven't seen any **revisions** after that last draft, but... to be honest they were pretty close, right? Maybe we could just take it the rest of the way ourselves?

Lola doesn't want to follow Gregory's strong opinion with another strong opinion. That might raise the level of emotion or tension. Instead, she wants to be a bit cautious, or careful.

To do that, she uses indirect language and words that soften her ideas. For example, she says "it would seem to me," and "maybe we could just." While Gregory's language gave the idea of "must" or "should," Lola gives the idea of "might" or "could."

Let's try some of these different ways of giving cautious opinions.

- Well, I tend to think that this is something for management to decide.
- It seems to me that Ryan would be the best person.
- I must admit that I'm not sure two weeks is enough time.
- To the best of my knowledge, our customers don't use social media much.
- I think it's fair to say that this solution would be too expensive.
- I could be wrong, but aren't we too busy to take this on?
- I'm no expert, but the design seems a bit too messy.

Lola mentioned that the "copy," or text that the writer worked on, was almost finished. This makes Kerry think they should look at that copy. Let's listen.

Kerry: So just **cut him loose** and work with what we've got? You know, it might be good for us to have a look at that last draft. Give me a sec... I left some copies on my desk. I'll be right back...

Lola: Okay, I'm going to get a **refill**...

While Lola and Kerry are out of the room, Vincent and Gregory continue the discussion. Now that it's just two colleagues talking privately, they feel more free to give their opinions informally.

Gregory: You know, this is stupid...

Vincent: Why's that?

Gregory: Well, obviously, using **freelancers** is just asking for trouble. If you ask me, we've got to stop **outsourcing** this kind of stuff in the first place.

Vincent: Yeah, I guess you might be right.

We heard Gregory give a strong opinion before. But he still had to be polite and respectful. Now, with only Vincent listening, he can be a bit more informal. And that means expressing his opinions with even stronger language, like "obviously" and "if you ask me."

What are some other ways of giving informal opinions? Let's run through some examples. Pay close attention to the expression at the start of the sentences.

- I'll tell you what I think: this plan is totally impossible.
- The way I see it, we need to cut costs right away.
- If you ask me, we're in big trouble financially.
- Obviously, this is going to hurt sales in a big way.
- Basically, this is the worst time to start a new campaign.

As we've seen, how you give your opinion depends on the situation. Sometimes you want to be careful, sometimes you want to be strong, and sometimes you want to be informal. And other times you might just want to give a basic opinion.

Now let's practice some of the language we learned in today's lesson. First, imagine you are in a meeting about a hiring decision, where you are asked your opinions about different job applicants. You'll hear a cue from the meeting chairperson, then I'll give you a suggestion for what you can say in response. We'll guide you through each step in the practice and provide an example answer for each response.

Ready? Let's give it a go.

Cue 1: All right, let's start with the applicant from LA. What are your views on her? First, give a basic opinion saying that she doesn't have enough experience.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: Okay, I think I can agree with that. So how about Andy Summers, from Chicago?

Now say strongly that you think he would be perfect for the job.

Answer: _____

Now imagine you are running a meeting about some possible changes to the company's website. You'll hear a cue from someone in the meeting, then I'll give you a suggestion for what you can say in response. Let's begin.

Cue 3: Okay, I think everyone's here.

First, say you'd like to get started and ask for opinions about the new homepage.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: I for one think that the colors are really great. Wouldn't you agree?

Now, cautiously give your opinion that the colors are too dark.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: I believe she doesn't really have enough experience for the job.

Answer 2: Yes, as far as I'm concerned, Andy would be perfect for the job.

Answer 3: All right then, let's get started. What are everyone's thoughts about the new homepage?

Answer 4: Well, I tend to think that the colors are a bit too dark.

To finish off, let's practice some of the vocabulary and expressions we've covered in this lesson. In a moment, you'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a beep. Repeat each sentence, including the missing word.

For example, if you hear:

Example Cue: If Mallory keeps messing up, I think we should cut her <beep>.

You can say:

Example Answer: If Mallory keeps messing up, I think we should cut her loose.

After each response, we'll provide the correct answer. Let's begin.

Cue 1: With these delays, I believe we'll have to stretch the **<beep>** on the project.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: Okay, is there anyone else who wants to **<beep>** in on this issue?

Answer: _____

Cue 3: If the new catalog is finally finished, then we can go to **<beep>** next week.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: Now that we know the problem, we need to decide on the right course of **<beep>**.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: With these delays, I believe we'll have to stretch the **timeline** on the project.

Answer 2: Okay, is there anyone else who wants to **chime** in on this issue?

Answer 3: If the new catalog is finally finished, then we can go to **print** next week.

Answer 4: Now that we know the problem, we need to decide on the right course of **action**.

That's all for this lesson on expressing opinions. We've learned how to ask for opinions and how to give basic opinions. We've also covered how to give strong opinions, cautious opinions, and informal opinions.

Thanks for listening and see you again soon!

Language Review

A. Review Quiz

For each question, you must choose the sentence that best fulfills the given language function or purpose.

1. What is a good way to ask someone for their opinion?
 - a. So, you probably don't have an opinion on this, do you?
 - b. How do you feel about this issue?
 - c. These designs are pretty terrible, aren't they?
2. Which of the following is a basic expression of opinion?
 - a. You know, I'm a bit unsure about this for some reason.
 - b. There is absolutely no way we should accept this proposal.
 - c. In my view, Grant is the best person for the job.
3. How might you give a strong opinion?
 - a. It's clear to me that we need to find a new supplier right away.
 - b. What if we tried finding a new supplier?
 - c. Well, I'm no expert, but maybe a new supplier would be a bit better.
4. Which of the following is an example of giving a cautious opinion?
 - a. To be perfectly frank, we need way more information here.
 - b. I could be wrong here, but maybe we need some more information first?
 - c. It's obvious to me that we need more information.
5. How might you express an opinion informally?
 - a. The way I see it, this whole plan is crazy.
 - b. I wonder if maybe this plan is a little unrealistic.
 - c. In my opinion, we would be wise to give this plan more thought.

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

Fill in the blanks with words from the box below. Be sure to put any verbs in the right tense.

stand	cut	path
stretch	chime	hard

1. If I could just _____ in here with a question: how long have we owned this particular property?
2. Listen Ronaldo, I know you think we should sue these guys, but I don't want to go down that _____ if we really don't have to.
3. The proposal looks good, but I'm wondering if we should _____ the timeline a bit.
4. The sellers are in no hurry and have decided to take a _____ line in negotiations.
5. After 20 years with the company, they _____ me loose without so much as an apology.
6. Sue, we haven't heard from you yet. Where do you _____ on the idea of expansion?

Answers

Listening Questions

1. Kerry asks Vincent where he stands on the issue.
2. To introduce his strong opinion, Gregory uses the expression “to be perfectly frank.”
3. Lola uses the expressions “it would seem to me” and “to be honest” to express her opinion cautiously.

Language Review

A. Review Quiz

1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. b; 5. a

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

1. If I could just **chime** in here with a question: how long have we owned this particular property?
2. Listen Ronaldo, I know you think we should sue these guys, but I don't want to go down that **path** if we really don't have to.
3. The proposal looks good, but I'm wondering if we should **stretch** the timeline a bit.
4. The sellers are in no hurry and have decided to take a **hard** line in negotiations.
5. After 20 years with the company, they **cut** me loose without so much as an apology.
6. Sue, we haven't heard from you yet. Where do you **stand** on the idea of expansion?