

Meetings (5): Action points**Topic:** Meetings and action points**Aims:**

- To discuss five key questions for Action Points;
- To teach and practise some useful phrases for volunteering for and delegating Action Points;
- To teach some useful phrases for closing a meeting;
- To provide practice and feedback of the situations of closing a meeting.

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above**Introduction**

For many people, a meeting is only as successful as the Action Points it produces. Action Points are essential for moving things forward between meetings, and provide a focus both for the closing of one meeting and the opening of the next meeting. This lesson looks in some detail at what makes a successful Action Point. There is also a focus on the various steps involved in bringing a meeting to a successful close.

1. Lead-in

Write the following questions on the board. Students discuss the questions in small groups and then share their ideas with the class.

- a. What must always happen by the end of a meeting?
- b. What exactly are Action Points?
- c. What steps can we take in order to make Action Points as effective as possible?

Suggested answers

- a. Of course this depends to some extent on the meeting, but most meetings need to end with a clear focus on what has been agreed, and specifically what actions are going to be taken. Other important things include thanking participants, giving them a final chance to ask questions or raise issues not on the agenda, and formally closing the meeting so that participants know they can leave.
- b. Things that participants have agreed to do after the meeting.
- c. We normally need to include five key pieces of information: What exactly does the action point involve?; Who is responsible for performing the action point?; Who will monitor that person's progress?; What is the deadline?; and What will happen on that deadline?
In addition, it is important to put Action Points in writing and to send them round to all participants and other stakeholders for approval.
Finally, it is vital that Action Points are followed up in the next meeting, or preferably well before the next meeting.

2. Dialogue

Distribute the worksheets so that everyone has a copy. Go through the Five Key Questions with the class to compare them with students' own ideas from question (c) above.

Students then read the dialogue to answer the question. They compare their answers in pairs and then feed back to the class.

Answers

1. What: Email Stockholm Office to find out about crèche and get an answer
Who: Arnie
Monitor: none
Deadline: Next month's meeting
Follow-up: Arnie to report back to meeting
2. What: Investigate legal procedures
Who: Sabina
Monitor: none
Deadline: none
Follow-up: none
3. What: Plan and conduct staff survey
Who: Kelly
Monitor: Rachel
Deadline: Next month's meeting
Follow-up: Kelly to report back to meeting

3. Discussion

Discuss with the class whether it is a problem that not all the Key Questions are answered for each Action Point.

Suggested answer

They need to be answered by the end of the meeting, but there is usually a summing-up stage at the end, where the chairperson can go through each Action Point again to make sure all the questions are answered. If no monitor is appointed, it can be assumed that the chairperson will take responsibility. If no follow-up is specified, it can probably be assumed that the person will be expected to report back at the next meeting. However, it is always best never to make assumptions like this, and to be as clear and specific as possible.

4. Useful phrases for volunteering and delegating

Students work in pairs to try complete the phrases without looking back at the dialogues. When you go through the answers with the class, elicit more examples of useful phrases for each function.

Answers

- Starting a discussion on action points: coming; firm; take
- Delegating and asking for volunteers: task; volunteer; help; involved; might; delegate; ask
- Accepting: no; fair; useful
- Volunteering to help: seeing; make; would; organise; like
- Instructing and setting deadlines: could; prefer; need; report
- Asking for clarification and advice: exactly; pick
- Making an excuse: could; forget

5. Analysis

Students discuss the five questions in pairs and then feed back to the class.

Answers

1. can (I/you)?
2. Accepting a duty: Sure, no problem; OK ... that's fine; Yes, of course.
Accepting an excuse: OK, that's a good point; OK, fair enough.
Accepting an offer: Yes, that would be great; Great. That would be really useful.
3. will (I'll ...) and would like (Would you like me to ...?)
4. They all include modal verbs *could* and *would* to make them very polite.
5. exactly

6. Role-play (1)

Divide the class into groups. Make sure everyone fully understands the instructions, including the vocabulary (e.g. *a lift; a wheelchair ramp; a sliding door; deaf; blind*). Make sure each group has chosen a chairperson, but make sure also that they know not to allow the chairperson to do all the work: they all need to work to come up with ideas and Action Points, and to make sure the Action Points are properly planned.

Monitor carefully during the role-play, and be ready to give and elicit feedback at the end.

Note that Role-play (2) appears on the same worksheet, but will take place after the next exercise.

7. Dialogue: closing a meeting

Students discuss task (1) in pairs and then briefly feed back to the class. You may need to check they remember that AOB stands for *Any Other Business*. Note that one possible order is presented in the dialogue below, but other orders are possible.

Students discuss tasks (2) and (3) in pairs and then share their ideas with the class. Allow some flexibility with the useful phrases in task (3): the aim here is to draw attention to them, rather than worry too much about which function they belong to or in which order they were used.

Suggested answers

2. a, e, c, b, f, d
3.
 - a Is there anything else we need to discuss at this stage?
 - b Right, so are there any final questions?
 - c I suppose we could fix a time and date for that meeting now; How about making it ...?; That's ... at ...; Is that OK?
 - d OK, so thanks again everybody, and have a nice day.
 - e OK, so I just want to go through the list of Action Points; Is that OK, Arnie?; Is there anything I've missed?
 - f OK, so thank-you all very much; I think we've had a really productive meeting; Loads of really good ideas, and it really feels as if we're moving forward with this project.

Discuss task (4) with the class.

Suggested answer

The speakers use *going to* to talk about their plans. Earlier in the meeting, they used *will* to make decisions.

8. Role-play (2)

Divide the class into pairs and go through the instructions with the class. If you have an odd number of students, you could ask the extra student to practise closing a meeting with the whole class as an example, and then to join one of the pairs.

Monitor carefully and be ready to give an elicited feedback on the effectiveness of the language and techniques from this lesson.

9. Optional follow-up

Students work in small groups to role-play a meeting to plan how they will continue to learn English, and especially how they will make sure they remember and use the language and techniques from this series of lessons.

At the end, ask volunteers to report back on the Action Points they have agreed, and how they will be monitored, checked and followed up.

Finally, ask a volunteer to use the model from exercise 7 to bring the lesson to a close.