

Negotiations (3): Questioning and clarifying**Aims:**

- To discuss the typical stages in a negotiation, and the reasons for structuring a negotiation in this way;
- To examine the importance of asking different types of questions to clarify and probe;
- To teach some useful phrases for clarifying, summarising and responding;
- To provide practice and feedback of the situation of checking and responding to the other party's position statement.

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above

Introduction

In a negotiation, it's very important to know when to speak, when to ask and when to shut up and listen. Very often, simply asking questions and listening patiently to the responses can be an extremely effective way of obtaining vital information and concessions from the other party. Questions are also essential for checking that you have understood. This workshop also introduces some language and techniques for responding to the other party's position to prepare the ground for the bargaining stage, which comes next.

1. Lead-in: Negotiation stages

Cut up enough copies of the worksheet for students to work in pairs, with one set of slips per pair. They then try to put the 10 stages in the most logical order. Point out that there may be some disagreement over the best order. Then go through the answers with the class.

Suggested answer: 1e 2g 3c 4i 5a 6f 7j 8d 9h 10b (or ... 9b 10h)

2. Discussion

Students work in small groups to discuss the six questions. After a few minutes, open up the discussion to include the whole class.

Suggested answers: See also Reading text.

1. It can be advantageous to you if you follow a procedure.
2. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, but perhaps on balance it's better to go second.
3. To check you've understood correctly.
4. By encouraging the other side to talk, they may give away useful information or even make concessions.
5. You may force the other party to defend their opening positions, which means they cannot be flexible later without admitting they were lying earlier.
6. Repeating them as you understand them, and saying whether you think you'll be able to find a solution.

3. Reading

Students read the text to see what it says about the questions in exercise 2. They discuss their answers in pairs, including identifying which paragraph(s) addressed each question. Finally, discuss the answers and the advice from the text with the class. You may need to check some vocabulary from the text, but note that the key negotiating terms (in bold in the text) are explained in the next exercise.

Answers: 1A, C 2D 3F 4E, F 5G 6H

4. Negotiations vocabulary

Students work alone to match the words with their definitions. Encourage them to refer back to the text to try to work out meaning from context. They check their answers in pairs before feeding back to the class. As a follow-up, they could test each other in pairs by taking turns to read a word or phrase to elicit the meaning from their partner.

Answers: 1f 2k 3c 4g 5o 6m 7a 8j 9e 10n 11h 12b13l14d15p16i

5. Types of question

Go through the four types of question with the class to elicit what they might mean. Students then work in pairs to complete the matching exercise. When they are ready, discuss the answers with the class. Discuss also the follow-up question (Which of these questions might be dangerous?). You could also elicit more examples of each type of question. Note that there will be more work on hypothetical language in the next workshop, Negotiations (4).

Answers: Echo questions: 1, 9 Checking questions: 2, 5, 6, 8 Probing questions: 2, 3, 6, 7, 10 Hypothetical questions: 4, 10

- Question 7 is potentially dangerous because it might back the other party into a corner (see Reading text). For example, if they manage to provide a detailed and believable explanation of how they calculated their costs, it is then impossible for them to accept a lower figure later without admitting their earlier figure was exaggerated.
- Question 4 is potentially dangerous because, even though the language is hypothetical, it still may be taken as an offer. Non-native speakers may not understand the subtle language techniques here, or they may simply pretend they have misunderstood in order to extract a commitment from you. On the other hand, hypothetical language is still very useful in negotiations.

6. Clarifying, summarising and responding

Go through the instructions with the class to make sure everyone knows what they are looking for. They work alone to find examples of each function, and then compare their answers in pairs. Finally, check with the class.

Suggested answers:

- **Clarifying:** Is that right?; Have I understood that correctly? OK, good.; 2,000, was it?; Within two weeks of signature?; Right ... is there anything I've missed?
- **Summarising:** OK, so thanks for presenting your position. Let me just get through the notes I've been making, to check I've understood everything correctly; In terms of quantity, you said ...; You mentioned that there may be ...; Then you talked about ...; You also asked for ...; Finally, you talked about ...; You say you would need ...
- **Responding:** That does pose some problems for us, as I'll explain in a second, but I'm sure we'll be able to find a solution; That could be a real sticking point, because ...; So that's something we'll need to discuss carefully; ... which I'm afraid isn't realistic; We may be able to work out ... during this negotiation, but it really will depend on what we agree on all the other factors; OK, so again, this could be difficult – it would mean ... and obviously there are cost implications of that.

7. Role-play: preparation

Students work in pairs or small groups to spend about ten minutes planning their position. Encourage them to use techniques from the previous workshop (Negotiations 2).

8. Role-play

Put students into new pairs. If you have an odd number of students, you could have a group of three, where two students work as a single team. Make sure everyone knows that the aim here is to practise the questioning and responding techniques from this workshop, rather than position statements, so they should spend most of their time focusing on these later stages. Allow at least ten minutes for each negotiation. As a follow-up, they could stay in their roles from the second negotiation and continue with the next stage of the negotiation: trying to reach agreement on the variables.